

[THE POTESMFIN MOSAIC]



by

MARK TEPP0

I.

THE DREAM JOURNAL

A JOURNEY BY TRAIN

The rain has only been falling for a little while; there is still a dry odor in the air as if the damp hasn't yet soaked into the ground and the plaster of the dilapidated station. The rain is a curtain of beaded silver across the train tracks, a shivering veil hiding the rest of the world. Dream reality: the only existent realm is that of proximity; the rest will be **revealed as necessary**¹. If—when—I leave the station, the curtain will part, opening to a vast stage.

A single train stands in the station. The engine is painted blue and green with broad strokes moving in the endless rhythm of waves reaching for the shore. The engine is sheltered beneath the same **canopy**² as I; the five cars sulk out in the rain, their eyes shuttered against the glitter of rainwater.

I have a suitcase in my hand, a battered travel-all of worn brown leather and frayed seams. It looks like it has been hand-sewn from the carcasses of worn shoes. I am wearing a suit and overcoat, the long jacket too heavy and thick for this mildly damp weather. I put the suitcase down on the deserted platform and check the pockets of the overcoat.

There is a slip of paper in the inner pocket, **stationary**³ folded in half. It reads: "The last train leaves at 6.00pm. It crosses the river at midnight. In case there are delays, I have packed you a picnic dinner. **Love**⁴, N." A fragrance of **irises**⁵ and green tea haunts the page so faintly that I am not sure if it is really there, imprinted in the thin fiber of the page, or if my **memory**⁶ has spontaneously invented the **olfactory sensation**⁷ in response to the **letters**⁸ on the page.

1. FABRIC: "It is a common part of the lexicon . . ." [12]

2. HEAVEN: "The canopy of heaven was to be built by three brothers . . ." [19]

3. PAPER: "'It's blank' . . ." [35]

4. LOVE: "She loves me she loves me not she loves me she loves . . ." [29]

5. IRIS: "'See how the petals close together?' . . ." [25]

6. MEMORY: "They're doing research with mice again . . ." [31]

7. INCENSE: "Most dreams are like old serial movies . . ." [22]

8. LIBRARY: "Eco, of course, knows he is echoing Borges here . . ." [26]

There is a post-script. “I miss you, but I don’t remember why.” My heart is a squeezed lemon rind hanging in my **hollow**¹ chest. It’s hard to say if it is because of the sentiment of the writer or of the exactness of the statement to my own mental state. Can you miss something—someone—whom you don’t remember? Can you **feel the absence**² of a phantom limb you never had?

There is a watch on my left wrist, and it has stopped one minute short of six. The second hand quivers as if it cannot crest the fat minute hand. Time waits³—arrested, on the cusp, on the lip—waits for me to settle into this skin. The train waits, slumbering. The rain, falling, waits. This world has not yet begun.

I put the note in my pants pocket and take off the heavy coat. I leave it on the platform, the **discarded skin**⁴ of a man I never could be, and climb aboard the train.

The intercom squelches, ripping static so a cascade of bells can announce my arrival like a pair a manic xylophone heralds. The door of the carriage slides shut behind me, the lock clicking in concert with the sudden movement of the minute hand on my watch. It’s a loud second, a fraction of eternity pregnant with beginnings and endings, openings and closings, as the world is vanquished and made anew in the instantaneous death of a Cesium atom. My watch begins to tick loudly, begging for my attention. *Look at me*, I hear in its loud chatter, *look at my face. I am the keeper*, it says, *I am the official record of history. I have been started. I cannot stop.*



The train begins to move, its acceleration an exponential curve. I walk to the end of the first car and try the door that separates the carriages. For a moment, I fear it is locked, but is only stuck, and I manage to pull it open. The umbilical space between cars is filled with a loud, clockwork cacophony—flywheels turning, gears grinding, springs straining, chains rattling. The door to the second car is heavy, granite inscribed with **geometric**⁵ carvings—a

1. HOLLOW: “In the desert, there is a spider that builds a tower . . .” [20]
2. INTENT: “Intent is different than purpose . . .” [24]
3. LIMBO: “The secret to oneiric illumination is patience . . .” [28]
4. SCARECROW: “I had a patient who was terrified . . .” [38]
5. GEOMETRIC ALPHABET: “The architects of Babylon drew straight lines . . .” [16]

forgotten mathematical script of religious warnings. Ancient slabs cover archaic tombs, and the history of gravity is the **weight**¹ that seals. As I manage to open the door, a moldy exhalation of gas spurts out. My hands are red with dust as I breach the second car.

This the lounge car, gutted from end to end of internal walls and chambers. A hollow **heart**² where there is no difference between ventricle and aorta, no path for blood to follow. Rows of tables stretch into the distance, the haze of alcohol **drifting**³ from the barhaze in the center making it difficult to ascertain the truth length of the car. On my left, a pair of stuffed seals sit facing one another at the nearest table. The paneling is polished walnut and gold piping runs along the ceiling and floor. The seats are covered in a Burberry plaid as if a thousand scarves had been harvested to make seat-cushions and -backs.

Scarves and shoes. This world recycles. This dream bends back on **itself**⁴.

I sit down, uninvited, at the table with the seals and attempt to engage them in conversation. “Where are you going? Have you escaped from the zoo? Did you bring any luggage? Have you seen a menu?” The seals don’t answer, **eyes**⁵ staring in a perpetual contest of wills. I touch one of the seals and find its taxidermied hide warm and damp. The other seal blinks. Once. It doesn’t do it a second time.

Outside, sculptures of giant, long-legged birds have been raised in a line beside the tracks. Like a few seconds of stop-motion film, they climb up from the ground as we pass, their legs stretching beneath them. They are white and blue, and their beaks point south, toward the river, toward **midnight**⁶.

The **Ribbon Man**⁷, wearing only a thin white cloth about his waist like a waiter’s towel, approaches the table. He wears a rainbow assortment of ribbons pinned in a regimented grid to his **naked**⁸ flesh. The prick of all those pins mottles his skin, an ordered sequence of bruises and blemishes beneath

1. FINAL LAW OF ENTROPY, THE: “Language betrays . . .” [15]
2. HEART: “There is an old belief about the heart . . .” [18]
3. DRIFT: “The dunes are like ocean waves . . .” [9]
4. SERPENT: “Why do snakes shed their skins? . . .” [40]
5. EYES: “It was hard to transcribe this dream . . .” [11]
6. MIDNIGHT: “The most terrifying dream I had as a child . . .” [33]
7. MASSA CONFUSA: “In the beginning, there is chaos . . .” [30]
8. BARE: “He lifts the catatonic seal from its seat . . .” [7]

the haphazard pattern of his silk patchwork. The upper edge of his loincloth is red with blood, a scarlet line circling his waist. “Are you traveling to the city?” he asks. His voice is the mellifluous melancholy of a lonely oboe.

“Just across the **river**¹,” I tell him. “Is that where the city is?”

He raises an eyebrow, arching a row of red ribbons. “Not at night.”

I shake my head. “I must not be going there, then.”

“What does your ticket say?”

“I don’t have one,” I tell him. “Just a note saying that the train crosses the river at midnight.”

“Ah, you seek the House Indivisible.” he says, nodding at the seal that did not blink. “Unless there are delays.”

Delays and diversions². **Obstacles and obstructions**³. Dream travel is never completely Euclidian; sometimes the most direct route is a loop that eats its own tail. “Yes, unless there are delays,” I agree.

He points at my briefcase, **yellow**⁴ ribbon dangling from the tip of his finger. “Did you bring food?”

“I brought a picnic,” I tell him. I feel like a spy, a clandestine agent crossing into enemy territory. This is my contact, and our conversation has already been written for us, an exchange of codes and meaningless phrases that hides a deeper message. “I can share it with you.”

II.

NOTES TO THE DREAMS

1. RIVER: “Rivers figure predominantly as barriers . . .” [37]

2. THE THIRD DREAM: “‘Where to?’ the cab driver asks . . .” []

3. THE SECOND DREAM: “The alleys surrounding the clinic are filled . . .” []

4. EYES: “It was hard to transcribe this dream . . .” [11]

BARE

He lifts the catatonic seal from its seat and places it on the floor. It begins to melt, slowly leaning forward as its bottom turns to slush. He sits in the vacant chair and rests his hands on the table, palms up. The stains growing from his life line are like tiny rose blossoms.

I put the case on the table and open it. Scarlet birds fly out.

My hat is gone. I gave it away to a phantom memory of a man who liked me more than the others. They blamed me. I was convenient, a straw effigy of their helplessness. They wanted to beat me with their hands, with the cheap chairs from the hospital waiting area, with the metal IV stand ever-present by Nora's bed. They wanted to see me disintegrate. Like their hope.

I cannot touch my head. My hands are nothing more than ghost fingers on the end of phantasmal limbs. I flail, and touch nothing. There is nothing but the acrid darkness, salty against my tongue and eyes. I cannot protect myself; I cannot use my hands as a cheap shield to cover my head.

Its voice has found me. *Just one more.* That long-chain lab-grown beast of chemical intent, that manmade dose of psychopharmaceutical deconstruction. *Just one more . . .*

Isn't that what she wanted? Just one more trip. *Just one more.* I said yes. I said take my hand. And her fingers did not tremble. I should have known. I should have stopped her.

Why? For what tiny sliver of life that was left for her? The irresolute passage of those final days. The perpetual hours of pain. Those excruciating minutes of boneless panic. Those flickering instants where the endless alienation of dissolution peek through the threadbare veil of reality. Yes, you will be alone. Yes, you will fall for an eternity. Yes, the bleakness you feel now is a surfeit of emotional and physical pleasure compared to the hollow vacuum that waits for you. *Yes, right over here. So close. Yes, like that. Just one more step.*

Was this what you were saving her for?

You want to join her now, don't you? You want to flee from this abyss, run back into the embrace of the dream and find her. You want to tell her she was right. It is better to run away, isn't it? It is better to bury yourself in the dream, wrap yourself in its warm water, and float forever. Yes, this is better.

She is calling you. Hear that sound? That undulating echo of whale song? That is her voice. Go to her. Go now. *Just one more step.*

DRIFT

The dunes are like ocean waves, perfectly regular crests as far as my eye can see. The capricious djinn of the desert have left curls in some of the peaks, little twists of sand that will not last. The grains run off these scallops like those of an hourglass. Each dune is moving to the west, one grain at a time. In a hundred lifetimes, the sand will have traveled the same distance that a man can walk in a day.

And yet, in a hundred lifetimes, the sand will still be here. The man who walked those few miles will not. Such is the nature of identity.

So, too, is the nature of God: everywhere and nowhere, everything and nothing. No-thing is not the lack of identity. It is the purest of identities, uncomplicated by dualities and personalities. It is perfectly defined, as it is the brief infinity before all energy, all thought, and all form came into being.

From no-thing came every thing—the sky, the clouds, the sand, the wind, the tiny flowers that bloom in the navel of these dunes, the flat lizards that dig themselves out of the sand at moonrise, the distant palm trees that ring the oasis of my exile, and the blood and bone that make up my body.

There are words in the sand. I do not know who has written them. Every morning, when I walk away from the palm trees with the sun rising over my right shoulder, I find the words snaking through the shadows of the dunes. They are never in the same place, and, some days, I spend most of the morning searching before I find them. On those days, the djinn have already started to blow them away.

I do not understand the words. They are expressions of an alien alchemy, filled with incomprehensible formulae and heretical discourse. At first, I thought they were being written by those responsible for my exile in an effort to extract a confession from me, but such thought is born of loneliness. No one knows where I am; no one knows the path to this desolate place.

No, I have finally recognized the hand that writes these words in the sand,

though I have no memory of such work. Each day, I seek out the writing in the sand to rediscover what I have dreamt, to learn what I have forgotten upon waking.

EYES

It was hard to transcribe this dream; I did not want to give it strength by committing it to this journal. In the end, as you can see, I have declined to provide any details. I am not trying to be obtuse, I am not trying to hide things from you; rather, I am trying to . . .

. . . What am I trying to do? Lately I have suffered a crisis of conscience. Is all this an attempt to justify my illness? To disguise the damage, to hide the rot? Is this just a way to not face what is truly happening? Cast it as a mythological crisis, as an oneironautic adventure to the wellsprings of the spirit and the imagination. Yes, my story is your story, is the story of all humanity. They (and you) do not understand the division within, are not aware of the decay in the duality matrix. I must show the Way. I am the guide and the martyr, the first and the last.

What is that quote? “Let those who do not believe be blinded so that they may not see the light.” What if, in that moment of being struck blind, your non-belief is shaken? Does the Divine reverse its action, or is the supplicant now a believer but still bereft of sight? Or are you given some other manner of “sight”—some sort of precognitive or oracular vision—in return for your sacrifice?

Is the Oneiroi a visionary reward for the non-believer who has come to his senses? Are we—the oneironauts—all damaged creatures who have come crawling back to the feet of the Divine, abject in our shameful narrow-mindedness? Are all madmen not contrite converts to some internally realized Godhead?

Can you not see how you will unmake the world if you say “yes” to that last question? Harry, can you not see how the Tower fell?

You must wake up, Harry. The Abandoned Sun is coming.

FABRIC

It is a common part of the lexicon, usually attributed to Time and Space (as in: “Something has ripped through the fabric of the Time/Space Continuum!”). I use the word when talking about the Oneiroi with my patients because it is an easier concept for them to wrap their heads around than some of the more historically referential terminology that we employ (including going all the way back to Artemidorus for the term we use to describe who we are). *Imagine, I tell them, that your dreams are nothing more than strips of fabric covered with incredibly detailed needlepoint.*

Some of them attach the idea of the Greek Fates—the three wyrd sisters who spin and measure the threads—to this conceptualization of dream narrative, and I don’t discourage this symbolic linkage. It has the unfortunate baggage of implying that external agencies are actually responsible for the weave, but over the years, I’ve learned that it is nearly impossible to dissuade my patients of the notion of an external deity. The Western Mind has been, for the last two thousand years, indoctrinated with the idea that personal responsibility has been abrogated by the ultimate existence of a Supreme Being; this programming isn’t going to be dissolved overnight.

Historically, the dream environment was likened to an ocean (which should give some insight into why we are called ‘-nauts,’ with the obvious reference to the Grecian adventurer Jason and his fellow sailors), but in the last few decades, there’s been a philosophical drift away from a definition that implies a completely fluid state. Oceans are barrierless; once you are in them, you can travel in any direction, and any point in an ocean is completely detached from any referential landmark. Water is ubiquitous and does not allow for an “edge,” if you will. The concept of “fabric” means we can keep an implication of fluidity, but can instill a basal foundation. In all dreams, there are rudimentary rules that govern the function of the realm; yes, the rules are completely subjective to the dreamer, but the very act of defining them is what creates the dream.

Kabbalists refer to this point as I AM—and it is the expression of the Concealed Godhead within the infiniteness of his being. This was the primary dot of reality, the white shining point. It is the basic principle of geometry: first you need a point that anchors your equation, and from that point, you can build the rest of your mathematical universe. Or, as the ethnographers like to call it, your “cosomology.”

Yes, I realize the *reduction* of this argument fails to consider the non-linear nature of time (and, correspondingly, the abstract causality of some dream narratives). But the oneirologic use of the word “fabric” is our effort to systematize a linguistic vocabulary. We agree that dreams are not truly oceanic—they have direction, albeit confused and distorted, and they have a defined ruleset which gives them an impermeable foundation—but aspects of them are aquatic, therefore we liken them to dynamic planar objects. Fluid surfaces. Fabric.

I am not, as you may have already guessed, a theoretician. I am a practitioner. It has not been my habit to engage in philosophical considerations of what it is that I do. There are navel-gazers out there—psychonauts who experiment on themselves and extrapolate on the immutable from their subjective oneirological space—and many of them engage in endless online discourse about real “subjectivity” of what they have encountered. There are others, of course, true seekers whose labors are solitary and without such public exoneration. These are our mental alchemists, the Grail Knights who seek the mystical metaphysical cup that will illuminate our existence. They are the ones who are obsessed with transcending the archetypal Thresholds.

I am just a simple healer. My tongue is uncomplicated and direct. My obfuscation is unintentional and a failure of my own understanding, not of the objective conceptualization of the Oneiroi. But, is this simplicity preventing comprehension of what has changed within me?

My relationship with my “patients” . . . yes, see? There is an implied professional relationship buried in my language that has informed my definition of my reality . . . is such that I am the doctor, the shaman, the wise man. But this is a subjective definition of self and has no correspondence to an objective reality, or even the subjective reality of another individual.

My efforts to define “fabric” for you are part of my fabric. Do you see the inherent fallacy of this epistemology? More critically, do you see the danger of becoming too obsessed with this error? This is both a Prison and a Not-

Prison. As is breaking free of this fallacious world-view: another pairing of Prison and Not-Prison.

Dualities. Still. Schizophrenia is always part of the answer, as it continues to be part of the problem. Recursions again. The endless shadows spawned by the mind.

FINAL LAW OF ENTROPY, THE

Language betrays.

Memory decays.

Love, if it ever even existed, dies.

Creation fails.

The Word—the Logos, the Divine Spark, the Unutterable Oh!—remains.

As it ends, so it begins.

GEOMETRIC ALPHABET

The architects of Babylon drew straight lines, hard geometry to define edges and perimeters. They measured the arc of the sun with triangular devices, plumbs dropping straight down like descending vertebrae. They threw rhomboids in the air and watched how they were stretched by the wind. As the pit was dug, the loose sand was collected in perfect barrels and the filled barrels ringed the circumference of the pit in concentric circles. The architects agreed on a number and, when the foreman of the diggers reported that the pit was the depth of that many men standing on the shoulders of one another and the foreman of the sand packers agreed that the number of concentric circles of barrels was the same, they pricked their hoary thumbs and made their marks on the drawing of the Tower. They sealed the geometry of the Tower with their hearts' blood and put away their arcane tools of measurement and took up the hammer and the pick.

The stones were carved and shaped by the calloused hands of thirteen men. It took two mules and three men to transport each stone to the pit where they were cemented in place with a mixture of sand and shit and blood and sweat. The Tower was perfectly proportional, drawn on an infinite scale and yet still fit to the dreams of men. It took many generations to build the Tower, a number equal to the depth of the pit and the rings of sand about the rising base of the stone finger being raised to Heaven. Each mason fathered another child for every full count of bricks that he cut from the mountains—children, rings, generations, spans deep; the geometry was precise, and each mason fathered an unequal number of boys and girls for the geometry of the Tower was unique and indivisible. Their children made other children, and every third generation spawned thirteen new masons to replace the old men whose hands were too arthritic to cut stone any longer.

When the Tower was almost completed, one of the mule teams dropped a stone. They were children of the twenty-second generation and had never known a time when they were not conscripted to the mule teams, dragging

stones from distant quarries to the hard, brick finger by the sea. The team of three formed a triangle about the mule, one leading and two following. The man in front was day-dreaming, staring at the sky and wondering if it was his children who were going to the ones to finish the Tower. He did not see the hole in the roadway and failed to guide the beast. The mule stumbled, its ankle breaking in the hole, and the shaped stone of the Tower shifted in the harness. The weight distribution was upset, and the injured mule collapsed, the full weight of the stone falling upon its flank and upon the roadway.

A chip the size of a small child's hand split off the stone, unnoticed by the team. They dragged the block all the way to the Tower, delaying all production until they arrived (each stone, you see, had its place upon the walls) and, in a rush to recover the lost time, the foreman did not notice the damage to the stone.

The chip was small, but it was enough for the wind and the rain. A generation later, the stone cracked. Another generation later, it shifted, collapsing in on itself. Thirteen days later, the Tower came down.

HEART

There is an old belief about the heart: it is the seat of the soul. If you eat a man's soul, much like you would devour a fish, you assume his spirit. You take on his desires, his dreams, and his debts. In the four-chambered rooms of the five-pointed temples, the acolytes of the Abandoned Sun preach of the Transference, the passage of the debt from their fallen fathers.

"Take of this flesh," they say, offering the cold meat of the dead to the newly initiated, "so that you may know of the desire which bound it."

"Take of this blood," they say, offering the sour wine of the deceased to the new children, "so that you may know of the dream which inflamed it."

No vessel is empty. As long as there is a debt owed.

HEAVEN

The canopy of heaven was to be built by three brothers, blacksmiths all. One—Aegenus, thick like an old tree with eyes of green fire and hair like thistles—said it should be round, a bowl cut in half by one swift stroke of a supra-heated blade so that the melted edges could be seared into the world.

The second brother had a habit of rubbing the knuckle of his left ring finger; the digit ended just below that last knuckle, scar tissue worn smooth and shiny from his constant ministrations. His name was Xernbawe and he believed that Heaven was square, held up not by one pillar but by four.

The third brother, Ghen, was lame in one leg and deaf in one ear, and he stumped painfully down to the bird hut by the river. "Old Mother," he asked the old witch who lived there. "How should we make Heaven?"

"My fire is dying," she said. "Gather me wood, and I will tell you."

Ghen dragged dead trees down from the hills and cut them into short logs that would fit into the narrow mouth of her soot-blackened fireplace. He stacked the wood behind her crooked house, shoring up the building's developing cold-weather hunch. Resting his aching leg, he sat on her dusty hearth and nursed her fire back to health and heat. "Tell me the secret, Old Mother," he asked her a second time.

"I already have," she replied.

Ghen watched sparks float up into the darkness of her chimney and understood Heaven's purpose.

HOLLOW

In the desert, there is a spider that builds a tower. I have found one in the shadow of an old rock, a corner of some ancient temple that has been forgotten for a lifetime. The wind chips at the old stone, flaking off shards of pale granite, and the spider collects these to fortify the walls of his circular passion.

He builds this tower so relentless, so resolutely, as if he can and will eventually reach Heaven. I tower over him (inconceivably taller from his perspective) and, in his short existence, he will not manage to build a spire taller than my knee. And yet, I am no closer to the Divine that he.

Not that way, at least.

Perhaps, then, the structure he builds does not extend up, but down and inward. The tiny stack that pokes up out of the sand is the extrusion of his effort, the physical displacement of what he carves out beneath the surface. Much like our flesh, that physical detritus of our spiritual exertions.

Those who feared my thoughts believe the desert will keep them safe. They believe the sands will claim me: striping off my skin, boiling my blood, and pelting my skeleton with the grit of a thousand thousand vanquished stones. They believe the sun will dry my brain, turning my thoughts to dust, and these heretical notions of mine will be lost forever. They believe all of these things, but do not realize such belief is merely hope.

The spider and I are quite alike. I, too, am building a tower. Each night, as the sun vanishes into the endless sand sea, I turn inward and dive deeper into the phantasmal ocean of my mind. Each night, I cleanse myself further; I have already undergone the transformation of the phases, mirroring the face of the insane moon that watches my progress; I have washed myself in the seven streams; I am bathing in the light and non-light of the thresholds. Diving ever deeper.

And, yet, I do not leave my tents. And, yet, I am closer to God than ever before.

This morning, the spider's tower was gone. I searched in the crevices of the old temple rock, and dug up the sand where he used to be. I found nothing. It was as if the spider and his tower were never there.

Maybe I will disappear the same way when I reach the hollow gate. Maybe I will become so hollow on the inside that my body will become a breath lost in the wind.

This is not belief. This is hope. I, too, am wracked with the same frailty as my naive captors. We are all equally ignorant under the gaze of God, even those of us who seek to find Him.

INCENSE

Most dreams are like old serial movies. There may be auditory components—speech or the occasional sound effect—but mostly they are just grainy images. The dreamer is the only one in the theater, and the old projector clacks along at twenty-three frames a second, running through that single reel of film. Occasionally, there will be an insert—black background, white lettering—containing dialogue or an explanation of events. Very few dreamers invoke any of the other senses.

Many of my patients are surprised when they discover their sense of smell in their dreams, or some auditory event intrudes upon their psyche. Once, I did some work for a lonely man who wanted to understand why he couldn't find companionship. In his dreams, we discovered his sense of touch was over-sensitized. This hyperawareness informed his waking hours, albeit unconsciously, and women whom he met were continually put off by his subliminal resistance to physical contact. (And his psychologist, to her credit, realized that his issues of intimacy were so deeply rooted that no externalized systematic personality reconstruction would ever really take hold, which is why she sent him to me.)

My sense of smell is more acute in the Oneiroi. In the flesh, I tend to be a little dense when it comes to the olfactory, but when submerged in dreams, I overcompensate. It isn't a conscious decision—some affected augmentation of my diminished nose—but rather, it is an internalized reaction. I enjoy the sensory detail of scent, and in the Oneiroi, I am able to realize that want.

Why don't I make the same effort in the physical world? Why don't I investigate ways in which I could train my nose? I don't really know. It isn't lost on me that such a physical denial is an inadvertent reflection of my own personal idiosyncrasy: the Oneiroi is given more weight than my waking reality. It is a neurosis not uncommon to oneironauts; such denial is an integral aspect of the seduction of dreaming.

But, to stick with the discussion of scent. As a dream symbol, incense

itself is just an object of atmosphere, but its presence is a reflection of an aspected virtue of the Oneiroi. Like mirrors that reflect an abstraction or a distorted vision of the dreamer, incense is an objective symbol. It is a smell untainted by the subjective filter of the dreamer.

INTENT

Intent is different than purpose and not quite the same as rationale. Intent is the catalyst that changes the potential into the kinetic. An object can be unaware of its intent, it can be inert even, but that does not mean that an intent is not buried within it.

Our cells hum with intent. Our DNA is informed by intent. It is not ours. No, it was there before we became conscious. It is part of the collective connective. It is the spark that made us grow brains instead of fins, hands instead of photoreceptors, and mouths instead of scent glands. This intent is the finger of God, pushing us.

To ask after someone's intent is to inquire into the core of their identity, to request that they show you the tiny icon pinned to their ventricle wall. This secret image—oh, we all have this small photograph hidden in our hearts—is the impetus for life. It is the captive spark of our desire, and it is the only treasure we hoard.

But do our ribs not simultaneously protect our intent and prevent us from touching it? Is that not the greatest irony of humanity? We are both jailor and jailed. We are living cages.

IRIS

“See how the petals close together?” she said, indicating the sealed mouth of the purple iris. “Not any insect can gain access to the tender nectar. The bee has to be strong enough to push the petals apart and push its way down into the tube of the flower.”

Using two fingers, she spread the mouth of the iris open. “And, there. See how the iris offers itself to the bee? The insect rubs its belly along this groove, gathering pollen from this flower or leaving pollen from another.”

She releases the iris petals, and they close again. She strokes the bright yellow landing strip on the lower petal, the splashed indicator that directs the bees to their landing point.

“Nature rewards the strong and persistent,” she says.

She is my doctor. I am her patient.

She is my teacher. I am her student.

She is my law. I am . . .

LIBRARY

“Libraries, over the centuries, have been the most important way of keeping our collective wisdom. They were and still are a sort of universal brain where we can retrieve what we have forgotten and what we still do not know. If you will allow me to use such a metaphor, a library is the best possible imitation, by human beings, of a divine mind, where the whole universe is viewed and understood at the same time. A person able to store in his or her mind the information provided by a great library would emulate in some way the mind of God. In other words, we have invented libraries because we know that we do not have divine powers, but we try to do our best to imitate them.”

—*Umberto Eco*

*in a speech delivered at the Bibliotheca Alexandrina
November 1, 2003*

Eco, of course, knows he is echoing Borges here, and he goes on to discuss some of modern variations of “book” before coming back to the idea that a book is a fixed text, a way of dissembling the universe that is fixed and immutable. A library, then, is a collection of the frozen apprehensions of the world. Yes, they are records of the passage of God, but they are the historical records of God. They provide proof of the existence of God, but fail to illuminate where He might have gone.

That is not to say that libraries are useless, moldering piles of vegetable matter that are better used for providing mulch for sunflowers or cherry trees. I, personally, love a good library. Reading the catalog of Dr. John Dee’s collection makes me feel like the mysteries of the world can be comprehended if one were to assemble enough texts, if one were able to read everything. Much like those librarians in Borges’s hexagonal infinity who dream of the catalogue of catalogues. But such an assimilation of knowledge

would simply inform of us of the world as it has been. (Borges, to his credit, posits that among the cryptic infinity of texts on the library’s shelves there exist tomes that predict the future, if one could actually read them.) Such an assimilation would inform us of God as He had been, and by doing so, would make us God. And, at that moment, the library—as it was defined—would cease to exist because it would be incomplete. (Though one could argue that whoever read all the books and became God would understand that the act of reading was synonymous with writing and that the library was created—*will be created*—by this act.)

Libraries are, in varying degrees, an expression of order. They refute the possibility of chaos. Their shelves are the walls that protect us from the mean-spirited emptiness of random chance. They are the persistence of our need for a Rational Existence, a God who has a Plan and who isn’t a Blind Idiot Creator, wracked by insanity and inconstancy.

I have been seeking order in my dreams; I have been trying to discern the Plan that informs the symbols and images that have been flooding my sleep. I have been attempting to gain access to that room in the library where I will find the book that will make my confusion comprehensible. But, even that book (yes, that one, the one she was devouring as she was being devoured—echoes of cycles of recursions) was filled with too many pages, too many possibilities. Every key could have been the right one.

The search for the key is a trap, I think. To seek the key is to be a cataloguer.

LIMBO

The secret to oneiric illumination is patience. Limbo, while reviled by the Church for being neither Above nor Below, is a perpetual state of indecision. We float. We drift. We wander. That is the natural course of our evolution. We were not ready for Heaven when it was made. We are not worthy of Hell. We live out our lives in-between. We are the point around which the universe turns—the dot that defines the line, the plane, the sphere. We are living geometry, and all time and space collapses through us in infinite density. And yet, we are weightless and formless.

We must have patience.

LOVE

. . . she loves me she loves me not she loves me she loves me not . . .

My fault? I thought I could make a difference. I thought I could save someone.

Thereby saving yourself? If you saved her, would that fix your mother's death? If you saved them all, would that make your father come back?

Is that your excuse?

I am a mirror, Harry. You said it yourself.

. . . she loves me she loves me not she loves me she loves me not . . .

But if we are all mirrors, then maybe I am reflecting you. Maybe it is your need to be forgiven by your father that you see in me. Maybe my father was an asshole, maybe he was a drunk, and maybe his *abandonment* of us was our liberation, and not our prison. Maybe it was the only—selfless act he ever performed. Maybe we don't miss me.

She did. Why else did she put the spike in her arm and chase after him?

. . . she loves me she loves me not she loves me she loves me not . . .

Because you wouldn't stop talking to her.

. . . she loves me . . .

MASSA CONFUSA

In the beginning, there is chaos. There is form, but it is unorthodox. Unorganized. Riotous. There is color, but no order. The peacock is the sun, and the sun is without light. This is the paradox of life. In the beginning, there are no principles, no foundations. Everything is tumultuous, the explosive decompression that follows the infinite density of the focus, and the world is an untamed profusion of blood, bone, and flesh.

Man does not know himself in this time. He dances upon the hills, resplendent with his peacock crown. His staff is filled with pure light and, when expressed through the pinhole of his cock, it is an eruption of rainbow heat.

The *massa confusa* is the firstborn child of primal chaos—the eidolon, the dybbuk. Man, firstly born in flesh from mud, does not know what lies within him. He does not feel the hard permanence around which his flesh and soul have been wrapped.

White light. Red earth. Pale flesh. Ruddy blood. The elements must be separated, distilled, condensed, incinerated, buried awhile in the ground, and given nourishment until they flower.

This is the restraint of life. In the end, there is precision and purpose. Nothing is unfixed, and discordance adheres to the architect's blueprint. The foundation holds.

MEMORY

They're doing research with mice again; though, it isn't like they've ever stopped, but in this case, they're looking at memory. Scientists are watching the hippocampus as they subject the little rodents to a series of tests (dramatic events of the sort that make a lot of little lights go off on their monitors), and are learning how the brain registers the sensory and neurological details of these events. They have discovered that each record of an event (each "memory") is a pyramid-shaped cluster of aggregated triggers (Tsien and Osan call the sub-set of neurons that register a specific characteristic of the event "neural cliques"). These pyramid collections are then transferred into long-term storage via a method of "re-experiencing" each event. But, it is these neural clusters that have fascinated the researchers because they imply that memory is not an unique record of an event, but rather an assembly of attributes.

Somewhat like saccadic masking—how we see isn't an accurate representation of external reality, but is actually an extrapolation done by our brains with the rapid-fire still images that our brains record. Memory is the same thing: attributes—binary switches—that are organized and interpreted by our brains into something approximating an accurate record. They form a duality matrix, though one that is more grounded in scientific observation than psychological organization.

Memories, then, become an assembly of binary data sets, and given an observable system, it is possible that other triggers—external ones, even—can be tripped by the presence of certain binary sequences. In other words, it may be possible to send a key sequence to an electronic lock by virtue of recalling a certain memory that exhibits a specific binary sequence. *Oh, yes, your memory of eating ice cream on the porch of your grandfather's house? Yes, 00010011 is correct. Access granted.*

Where 00110011 may be a different ice cream memory. One that has the additional attribute of having a dog in it. The neighborhood mutt, say, the

one which was small and brown and always friendly.

This is, of course, a gross oversimplification of the work being done, but I think the idea of memory as a collection of attributes rather than detailed sensory records assists in an understanding of how memory can be set adrift. On a purely computational level, changing memory is a matter of switching a few coding units from on to off (and vice versa). Organizational drift can be effected very easily by blanking whole regions of synaptic storage.

How will your mind know? The way it processes data up to the consciousness is purely interpretive; it unpacks a string of binary attributes and assigns sensory details, staples on an emotional reaction, and filters the result through a myopic set of religious and moral definitions. Is there a computational checksum that would reveal tampering? A snapshot of the data set against which the recalled memory is compared? No, I do not think the brain—for all its status as a massive neuro-chemical computer—has much in the way of a useful backup and data integrity verification system. Well, it does: you.

You are the one who finds the deficiencies in memory, the strange details that seem contrary to your world-view, the tiny inconsistencies that are counter to the psychological and physiological rules by which we understand reality. But what recourse do we have to those memories which seem faulty? How can we determine what they should be?

I took Nora to Paris once, building a weekend escape from a memory of a visit when she was in high school. We went to the Musee d'Orsay, and she said the couple in Toulouse-Lautrec's *In Bed* were us, and the angelic hermit of Redon's *Vieillard ailé barbu* was how she imagined me when I became an old man and outgrew the hat. I showed her Gustave Moreau's *Galatée*, and taking my hand, she pulled me into the picture. We made wreathes of red and yellow flowers, and had lunch under the spiny trees. It was, she said, the best time she had ever had in Paris.

There. See? None of it was real in the conventional, in the scientifically observable sense, but what did her brain care? It dutifully stored all of it as strings of binary data sets. Whether she set the switch that identified these data collections as real or imaginary is, well, something only she can say.

I've marked them as true. I mark them all as true. As a data collection that defines personality and identity, is my memory more corrupt or more accurate?

MIDNIGHT

The most terrifying dream I had as a child was of the fortune teller in the desert. He would sneak up on me, appearing suddenly around corners or through doorways. Regardless of where and when I was, I would suddenly find myself in the waste, under a moonless sky. On a nearby dune would be the yellow tent of the fortune teller. His candles, their glow diffused by the thin fabric of his tent, are the only light.

The first few times I found myself in this place, I would try to go back, try to exert control over the dream and flee this desolate place, but it would never work. Beyond the glow of the fortune teller's lamp, there was only endless black sand. There was never any sign of where I had come from, and I never dared to walk so far that I couldn't see the glow of the lamp.

Where would I have gone if I had lost sight of the lamp? Is that where those who fail to wake up from sleep wander? Would I have become one of the Oneiroi's forgotten ghosts, endlessly stumbling through black sand in a vain effort to find some solace?

Frater Croix-I-lux of the O.T.N.U. writes in his monogram *De Matrimonium Mortis et Somni*:

Reality is the solidified dream of the Archon. We cannot destroy the Wanton Unconscious of the Will; we can only wriggle beneath its Riggers. We are the Loophole Children, the particles that slip through the Phantasmal Gap between Belief and Function. Our dreams are but reflections of Dark Dreaming, imperfect shadows that have shape only because we cannot separate our fear from His Will. As liberated as our souls may become, we are still connected to the Dream.

Sometimes the fortune teller looks like Frater Croix-I-lux before the cancer started to eat at him.

I never understood why the fortune teller frightened me so. I always woke from the dreams that he invaded before he cast his cards.

PAPER

“It’s blank.”

“Hold it up to the light.”

“Oh, yes. I see. That’s very clever. Is this how you used to pass notes in school?”

“No, it’s a little obvious when you have to raise the page up like that.”

“Yes, I suppose it is. The page doesn’t have to be blank, does it? You could write something mundane on here. A shopping list, maybe, or a note. ‘I miss you, but I don’t remember why.’ Something like that.”

“You could. A lot of old manuscripts were done like that. Secrets were written between lines and in the margins. Most of the old knowledge has been preserved that way.”

“Listen to you. ‘The old knowledge.’”

“What?”

“You make it seem so mysterious, so clandestine.”

“But it was. This is how the heretics hid in plain sight. They would author epistles and monographs that seemed to uphold the virtues of the Church, but hidden along the outer edge of the page were lines and lines of blasphemy.

“The alchemists, too, they passed their secret recipes along via hidden writing. That’s why the original manuscripts are so highly prized. Sure, you could make copies, but they were just strange writings—treatises that seemed to almost make sense, but not quite. That was the whole point of the hidden key: without it, the book seemed to work, in theory; but in practice, the text—as written—never worked.”

“What about you and your friends. The oneironauts. Do you leave messages for each other?”

“We don’t share the same variation of the Oneiroi.”

“Why not? You’re sharing mine.”

“That’s different.”

“Is it? How so?”

“It’s just . . . not done like that, Nora. We don’t intrude on each other’s dreams. It’s, well, rude . . . and dangerous.”

“But you could? You just don’t.”

“That’s right.”

“Does everyone think the same way? Is this one of those laws no one ever contemplates breaking?”

“Yes.”

“Are you sure?”

“Well, it’s not like I’ve signed a contract, or we’ve all taken a blood oath or something. Wandering into another oneironaut’s dreams is just not done. It’s always been that way.”

“And you all accept that?”

“Yes, Nora. We do.”

“But if someone didn’t, how would you know? The dream would be like this piece of paper: blank, unless I know how to look at it correctly.”

“Yes, for the sake of argument, that would indeed be the case. Unless you had the key, unless you knew the way, you couldn’t see the hidden content.”

“Turn around.”

“What?”

“Turn around. Look at the wall behind you.”

“There’s nothing—”

“Do you see it now?”

RIVER

Rivers figure predominantly as barriers and as symbols of transformation. Heraclitus believed you could never step in the same river twice, arguing for a forward progression of time that has never been fully expelled from the human sub-consciousness. Children are drowned in slow, muddy rivers and are saved as adults. John was the first river crosser, the first to step into a stream and discover a alter the flow of water. “I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.”

Rivers carry away the dead and offer a means to escape time. Drowning is a failed alchemical effort, a washing of the gross material of humanity that fails to produce the next reagent.

Laertes: Alas, then she is drown’d

Gertrude: Drown’d, drown’d.

Laertes: Too much water has thou, poor Opheila.

— *Hamlet*, IV.vii.183-185

SCARECROW

I had a patient who was terrified of scarecrows. Scarecrows are just effigies, I explained to her, stuffed doppelgangers meant to terrify crows. They're just patchwork, straw-filled dummies, even if their smiles are off-kilter. Most of them don't even have real legs. I suggested the best way to turn any such symbolic monster into a buffoon was to watch *The Wizard of Oz* while listening to *The Dark Side of the Moon*. While baked out of her mind, of course. It is much easier to see how the scarecrow is a loose-limbed imbecile, I told her, when you're listening to Floyd and re-breathing a marijuana haze. She wasn't impressed, but the suggestion did break the ice enough that when I told her my actual plan for curing her, she didn't walk out on me.

Her scarecrows were filled with rats, and their smiles were filled with holes that the rats peeked out through. I know because we went in to her Oneiroi and faced not one, but three. They all wore the same style of overalls, with knotted rags hanging out through broken zippers. When we had dispersed all the rats and rendered the strawmen impotent, I untied the knots in one of the rags and showed her the three symbols burned in the fabric.

"Maybe it is time you told someone," I suggested, and she agreed. She went back to her regular therapist, who suggested a support group that was very effective.

I told this anecdote to Nora, during one of our early sessions. Before we went into the Oneiroi together. She wanted to know how I had helped someone, wanted some reassurance that I wasn't going to take advantage of her while I was in her dreams.

Funny, that. I think she's in mine now, and she is taking advantage of me. I'm not sure how, being that she is dead and all. But there's a symbolic trail being laid out, a path through this maze (no, Harry, a labyrinth) that I am meant to follow.

A yellow-brick road, perhaps. I do feel like the scarecrow at the crossroad. *We could go that way. Or that way. Or that way.* Tangling myself in knots.

Maybe it is time you told someone.
No. That won't liberate me.

SERPENT

Why do snakes shed their skins?

For an answer, I want to point you to the story of the tail-devourer, the serpent who was God's first Creation. Self-sufficient, the tail-devourer was perfection, an immortal creature of perpetual existence: when it hungered, it ate its own flesh; when it grew thirsty, it drank its own sweat. It simply turned and turned and turned and had no needs other than its own.

But God—that infallible Creator—well, God did not grow bored with the tail-devourer, nor did He admit to failure in its creation (because it was perfect, so how could that be considered a failure?). Nevertheless God decided to Create another creature. One that wasn't quite as self-sufficient. If the tail-devourer was the perfect circle, the zero, the aleph (and, quite possibly, as it devoured its own end, the tau), then his second Creation would be one—the first, the Indivisible.

He named this Creation His shadow.

If the serpent who crawls on the ground and hides in the brush is but a symbol of the tail-devourer, of God's infinitely perfect creation, then what is its cast-off skin?

Yes, what are all those things we throw away? The accretions of experience that we leave behind us like flakes of dry skin. The memories we collect out of instinctual reflex but that we store so shabbily. What are these histories we leave behind?

abandon abaddon babylon falling star falling star