

Centrality

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Preface

The style of this work was modeled after *To The Lighthouse*, by Virginia Woolf. In particular, I made mantras out of her ideas of interior monologue, subjective vision, and conscious stream. I further amend her breakthroughs with the notion of structured stream, in which multiple perspectives are united by external events that affect each separate interior monologue at the same time, thus providing an external structuring effect on parallel conscious streams of different characters; all justified as a further attempt to write reality – if that were to any extent humanly possible. I also hope that the structure inherent in my approach bridges the gap between the beauty and depth conveyed by the stream of consciousness style and the incomprehensibility that often results from the faithful realization of that style in book-length novels or epic-length films. I want to stress, however, that above all, the goal of this work is to rigorously picture reality in all its essential yet subtle details by abstracting all the “slices of cake” from life’s infinite selection of moments of being. The most difficult part of the endeavor is to construct the concrete from the abstract. Woolf tried to do this by voicing the analysis of the moment. I shall attempt to do this instead, following the approach of Archimedes, by the way of examples. For fear of putting the readers to sleep, I have tried to make the work readable by describing only the nontrivial details, which, for the most part, are essential, abstract ideas I am trying to convey. This work is experimental, and, at the same time, I hope, accessible. Finally, I hope to capture a number of ideas never before expressed by any other writer in print while risking the imbalance of too much poetry for far less melodrama. Here, then, is my humble attempt at depicting a subjective Centrality.

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Part I

Stop flying, hummingbird; stop
singing, nightingale

Chapter 1

Beginnings

About the East garden

“Time about to move out and about,” rhymed Caesar. “Got nothing to do with things to do,” replied Jess. “Jump! Seize the moment! Swing the cord! Unhook the hook!” cried Caesar, stamping on the lawn. “Hang . . . sleep through night . . . dream through morning . . . wake the awaken . . .” murmured Jess, sitting there trying to read.

Cutting through grass with feet as scissors, Caesar bounced sideways into rocks, pots, trees – bam, slam, what joy in flying. Here, fly right over her head, sideways. Those prickly rose and pots are in the way! I’ll crack them open and look inside. No good leaping face first into dirt and sit picking needles out of my nose – do it the hard way, the only way – sideways. Wa! Thunderbolt! I’m a thunderbolt, I’m a thunderbolt.

Why move? No point in action at all. Caesar will jump right over those precious flowers raised with whole year’s worth of watchful patience and care and land straight into mud, avoiding, for one thing, me, since he’s sideways. He’s always yapping his chopping legs about causing havoc for everybody, and Aunt Beisy’s roses and pots. So unlike all the other children, who just want to explore, hold nature in their bosoms, feel the wind in their hair. Only you would never stop to consider other people, sitting here trying to get some rest and sunshine before filling the lungs again.

Leaves were being blown like a gale as Caesar approached the target, blind as a mouse in a maze, lured by the (faintest) smell of cheese that wasn’t even real. His legs chopping the grass like a helicopter, he descended

over the pots, then roses, then Jess. Move? Don't move; he'll glide right over and land directly in that puddle over there. He'll dirty his clothes all over and everybody would blame me for not taking care of him – he's so tiny, he knows so little, ooh chubby little thing, poor little guy's got no one to take care of him, oh if his mother were on this earth, she would scold her hair out. Then Aunt Beisy would clean him sparkling clean and rinse his fat little face – no don't want to, hate water, no – too bad, little guy, you're in for it. Chopping up and down the grass, heh? Stamping the roses, heh? Breaking the flower pots, trashing the lawn, plunging head first into the puddle, eating mud, heh?

Caesar landed on top of Jess, tearing some of the pages of *Le Tombeau de Couperin* loose. Then, though nothing extraordinary happened, the moment stopped; sun shone lightly over the pair, one's back on another's knee; wind held pace, for fear of perturbing the children; grass stopped wavering, fish stopped swimming, clouds stopped traveling, rivers stopped flowing, earth stopped rotating; all pondered the stillness, looking on, dreaming about Mary and Jesus, a pair of unconquerables, holding each other like sister and brother. "You little bastard" – wind blew, fish swam, water flowed – "don't you ever fly again." Then all became quiet in their movement, so as to sneak by Mary's wrath and enter her serenity, on choppy feet.

Heavenly sounds

In this place of timelessness and forgetfulness, beauty of mind still reigns supreme. There is much history here that can no longer be recalled; much life without animate existence; much ideas floating in the sea; much passion carried by the wind.

"*Samson et Delilah* Edward and I will play." Jess filled her lungs; Edward stretched his fingers; Mrs. Beisy wiggled her ears. Slowly, heaven began, flowing down from the tops of mountains, coloring all that it touches, refining its texture but leaving its shape undefiled, lightly teasing it, jumping around it, circling it, hopping close enough to touch it, then flying swiftly away, into the sunset. My life as of now, purged of all obligatory ways – sins of living in an imperfect, best of all possible place among the past – and all flights of usual fancy, now heavenly music descends upon this time, moving unseen but coloring all with the living breathing waves. That time when I cried when I ended Proust and I longed to live in it unseen, that was this, transformed,

but not diminished. That time when I praised myself, for I was lost yet found again, amongst everything that was about me to change me, that was this, transfigured, but not apart. I will do it. I will do it. And here I am again, finding the living breathing waves about me, tossing and turning and fighting and biting, and I here, almost alone, am one and the same, transported, but not away.

The notes kept jumping, the fires kept blowing, and heaven (not to mention Mrs. Beisy) stood still to listen, with her paint in hand. One can faintly hear them hum softly with the rise and fall, not to overshadow it, but to accompany it, admiring it, never closing in on its greatness, but touching it lightly, stroking it, letting it blow softly away – the birds listened, the roses and the trees listened, all listened in their own way. The keyboard listened, pounding here and there, jumping to its own between moments of greatness, then it too, listened softly, for its purpose in life is to accompany the greatest of the great. The gilded joys of picking and choosing, knowingly, yet semi-consciously, the keys that I know by memory, have not left. There's always that moment when things break down to their atomic, unstable, neutral reality: the realness of things. Then almost surely I walk above a mountain path, almost surely I am there safe and erect and living in a contemptuous content, when almost as surely I would fall one step to the side and thus end my life gloriously, with no passers-by, no procession, no tumultuous fanfare celebrating my humble deeds, listing every little contrived thing they can think of – he was unusually nonchalant, he possessed an extraordinary watch made of the brightest jewels found this side of the river, he was an accomplished and extremely entertaining amateur musician who almost always only missed a note on his keyboard on purpose to diversify his repertoire, he was, what they call, great for his kind, for he lived for that almost sure possibility of becoming great without ever becoming so, for he was destined by necessity to be tragically denied by forces of circumstance from the evidence of true genius by the ineptitude of men and the inequality of specular distribution of genuine insight, but he was not to be denied of his essence: the triumph of extraordinary mediocrity – and then missing the long and short of it, that I died because of the realness of things. Had I willed it? Almost surely not I, but some neutral force inside had wanted, beyond all things, to die. But I will certainly write them a note explaining the precise sequence of events, causes, and physical descriptions of angle, mental state, perceived and actual dimensions, likelihoods of falling versus not falling, detailed graphs of reaction times versus degree of muscular control, etc., before I die, so that

my death will be placed in the rightful context of historical fact and that no further fiction will be written upon such a matter-of-fact occasion.

The music gushed forth a new smoothness never before felt. It was that high note and low note, then a succession of little known notes, foreign to the experienced ear. It was that cessation of tumult and movement that drove out any point in action at all and replaced it with the harmony of two distinct, integrable, but opposing wills born of different heritages, built by people in factories who have absolutely no idea about the other, and coming to their own fragile agreement of their own will. It was the texture of instruments, one rough but elegant, suavely pounding its way across the bottomless sea, one weak but shrill, seducing the air and the wind with cries of monotonic, calming noise. Her lungs were filled again and again with that colored, refined, teasing air that came down the mountain to break away from perfection for devil knows how long a second to do that which was destined to be done – however unforeseen – alive on earth where the high note and the low note and the procession of unfamiliar baby notes charmed the ear, and hence, the will. And so happily ever after as a pair of husband and wife? Has the seduction stopped the pounding? But it was not to be, for the living breathing waves densified themselves over those little known moments of harmony, so that fragile things break, and their wills break, and things lose color. But now the poetry has been written and it's time to deliberate. Edward sped through that last repetition; might he not want to stop? The reed is a bit wet; I shall have to clean it. Is Aunt Beisy falling asleep on the couch; she's tired of cleaning that little rascal? And thing after thing, little snippets of one thing implying another, until, after all, it was time to stop; the sun was setting on this place with neither future nor past, timeless.

Heaven had covered up its tracks long ago, when everyone else were drawing back unnoticed, so that it slipped quietly away, taking the colors and the caresses with it, leaving behind the waves. And then everything was as it should be: perfection. Edward stood up, naked he felt. Everything else was naked. The sea breeze blew open the door hinges and leaked in the waves. The waves swept away all the colors and the light touches of harmony. The room was barren and desolate with the fine ornaments of records, shelves, antiques, books, histories, past lives, and a few people. It was all there, all they would ever need, in that little house, where books scatter around, papers fly about, and poems recalled and forgotten as people learned them. There was structure in that house. The books tossed about exactly where they should be, the people sitting in waiting for precisely as long as necessary, the fury of

mines positioning themselves under their long-destined targets, waiting for the precise instant to sweep the books and plates and flower pots off and drop them over that predetermined place on the couch, in the kitchen, over people's heads. The sea breeze blew open the windows and leaked in the winds. The winds blew away the age-old intentions and the feeble thoughts. Things were there for no reason at all, but to exist, and to justify their existence. The portrait of late Mr. Beisy yelled out for recognition of the mere fact of the way it is – I am here, brown and purple, and no other color, here, parallel to the gray table top, not tilted, unmoved, here, after all these years, to be remembered not for my life nor my deeds nor my will, but my picture, destined to last forever as ideas do, until I exhaust my essence upon realness – and no other way can it be, but to exist, here in the house adorned with old papers, furniture, books, statuettes, personalities, things past, and a few harmonious people.

Jess looked around for the children who should have been coming back. Instead, she found Waldo sleeping noiselessly in his little basket with his little bowl just within his grasp so that if anyone dared to take it away from him, he would instantly awake and groan playfully and hideously, waving his claws about (not that he would actually use them), pretending to be threatening like his distant ancestor, making (as far as he knows) the most bothersome noise that a cat can possibly produce, until he is eventually fed. How can anyone possibly like Waldo? But then how can anyone possibly dislike him? So feeble, elegant, and spoilt. People are their only patrons, that breed of aristocratic felines. Without us, they're gone, doomed, kaboo. Waldo: what a sarcastic, testy, stupid little name. Drop him into the jungle and let him survive on his own, and that silverish little fur ball would get picked out for a taste test in five minutes. Even if nobody notices him, he'll starve on his own. What, eat mushrooms? Ants? Fungi? His dear little stomach getting fed daily on nothing but chocolate and ice cream. He won't even crawl around for food, just starve on his back with no one to feed him, waiting 'til some vulture starts biting his little ear off to chew on. Then he'll make his bothersome little display and wave his claws around, trying to roar like a tiger, but ending up sniffing like a puppy. Still pretending to sleep, heh? Twenty-four hours a day, heh? From dawn till dusk, heh? Oh, I love Waldo so.

Edward picked up Waldo and threw him out the door for exercise.

The children

Edward stood looking into the glistening western sea, imitation waves and all, beamed down by the masculine, cowardly orange-ish sun, which, looking down, thought its spikes dreadful and cruel, like a patient staring at her dentist, admiring its skill but detesting its work. Thus it settled slowly down, inch by inch, avoiding as long as possible, that necessarily debilitating quenching of its manifold lusts for its creatures. Another day suppressed by the living breathing waves; all as well for our sun, who would live to see another day. Along with the defeat of its fiery activity comes the hope of a rise out of the damp coolness, when, again, heroism and triumph coalesce into a form of realness, and that wave, however omnipresent and eternal, yields its colors. Oh the sun, how fortunate your dear cycle of a life is! To die and be born again and again, at infimum. To lose your life ever and ever again, driven to death by some great unknown force coming out of your own precarious existence. To suffer through the monotony of eternally recurrent birth for a chance to pour yourself forth in the most tragic and beautiful of all human endeavors, again and again. That lust for death will never cease to pang you; but never can *you* ever hope to stop death. Thus what you want is what you must have. And though discoveries, creations, glories are daily brimming over your garden, nothing can ever stop your daily death. But do you really die? Do you coward away from our death and gaze happily, hidden, as we live a dark death? Can you move, seen and unseen, from here to there, a routine journey of creation, day after day, living static, horrible nights alone? Are you weary of that daily chore that brings you from East to West and back again, never finding anything new, but smiling monotonously upon that which you know by heart, hands, and toes? Do you long instead to die and go to heaven, so that you may gaze upon darkness forever and live through a life where you do not exist, where your present is your past? And out of nothingness comes your very own realness, that which pervades the world, never will you ever let go, never can you ever want to let go – the waves breathing in your image, the light shining over your body, the creatures living in your projection – never can sins of imperfect living intrude, none but your own will, eternally! But I will certainly approach him some day and smack his ears for being so insistent.

Waldo fell asleep on the grass. Edward picked him up and threw him on the ground for exercise. Overlooking the sea, the beach, the waves, all mingled compactly into a cell of abstract figure. Everything, together at

once, lighting the world of those cliffs. The sea was dusty with the clamor of ships civilizing its pagan waters. The wind was dusty too, but with the memory of ships past and sunk, as with the memory of all else, contaminating its purity. Long have the lost wind sought refuge quietly over the Eastern mountain sides held together by pure sun light of the feeble, thoughtful past. But the wind could not blow it all away, so it gathered and sat ready and poised, in vain to carry away that which belonged there forever. The pale blue mountains would not be swayed no matter how dusty the wind became. Thus they were poised for battle that never occurs, with the memory of things past poised there, year after year, waiting for deliverance that never comes. So it was there all along, high atop the highest of the ranges, surrounded by almost invisible clouds, thinking to itself, what shall I do next? It's a mystery to us all what to do next. There atop the blue skies, surrounded by the pastures of the highest plateau overlooking the horizon, was it, looking, waiting, getting up and sitting back down, anxious yet effortless, stooping, thinking, acting like a child who's lost her way, fearful but fearing. I am Caesar. I am Jess. I am Edward. I am. But shall this be all? What else am I? What can I be? What is? The thoughts of it darkened the sky for an instant slimmer than a flash of lightning. Then the winds blew upon the Eastern air again, though not yet away, for there is no future, no past, timeless.

The children picked up Waldo and passed him among themselves for want of exercise. Standing there, looking toward his destiny, Edward was unmoved by the usual clamor. Ben marched directly past, step by solitary step, five minutes to meal time, forty-five minutes to story time, one hour and thirty minutes to Tiff flew by, tripping everyone she saw, enlarging the holes in her pants. Shree got back up and put his book in his pocket and his glasses on his nose. Well, what of it, let's go. Becky helped Vicki up, who didn't need help; just that her new blouse was dirtied. Rhee walked on alone. Castleau jumped up and down and started kicking people again. Flow cautioned him, but he wouldn't listen. Rye kept thinking, what can I be thinking next? Little Evelyn crept forward, slowly, leading Jeanette behind. Edward quietly stared out over the clouds, beyond the dust, over the high clearing, through the air and out to the sky, that which lingered there for a fraction of a second, that thought, which, never stopping to catch the life, went on and out, carried away by the wind. Then it was all gone? All gone.

Out came Jess with her precious tube of heavenly sound in her hand.

Everyone stopped to greet, even Tiff. They were all here, every little one, boosted by their activities, teeming with energy. In a dream, no one can ever refuse that which drives us forward. As now, not all things of worth can satiate that bunch. Ben's bravery, Shree's intelligence, Tiff's recklessness, Rhee's conviction, Becky's sympathy, Vicki's desire, Castleau's energy, Caesar's innocence, Flow's responsibility, Rye's expressiveness, Evelyn's humility, Jeanette's will, pouring forth an essence of life's colors and transfiguring the present with the light of the future. But this is not what I want. The time flows shiftly forward, never stopping to catch a glimpse of where she is and how she has gone, never ceasing to race mere mortals in their journeys of death, but ever flying away, insatiable, unattainable, swiftly toward the debris of everything. That's not what I want, I say. Time will not listen for she is not human, but a nature's object, made to run without fail. No one will listen, for all are scrupulously eating and digesting, and throwing away their bodies to shred a new life. And all are changing so that nothing is the same. But what I want is there. It has it. But it knows not that it has it. I will find it someday because no time can mar what I want. And then I will have it and do what I want with it. Oh, the wild sea, the clear clouds, the murmuring trees renewing against time, please take heed for what I know, for all shall be here as you found it and left it, and the insatiable, unattainable whole will be here, willed or not. What I want will be here.

The sun went completely down. Land darkening by the presence of the elements – rising moon, black grass, hollow tree trunk, silver strips on rocks, dimness of the house lights – ready to cover itself in a veil of murky anonymity. The sun went completely down. The night drove anxiously forward to twist the feeble light into invisible holes, while the time flew carelessly away to herald the coming of the beacon of the unconscious – careful, meanwhile, to preserve the faint grace of the land for a future foray, and thus, to push but not to crush, to drive but not to tramp, to fly but not to shatter, for the land is her destined mother and mothers cannot be walked upon. The sun went completely, completely down. I should walk away. An inner being tells me to walk away, to deny the moment of its tyrannical control, to forgive and forget, to laugh off the present, to be my will. But what is my will? How shall I do what I want and what I will? I cannot. I can. I do not. I do. Where is that which pleases and soothes and comforts, yet is willed and destined? When shall I find that? I will not. I will.

What is life, Edward thought. For the umpteenth time, what exactly is it? Can one even ask what it *is*? Perhaps it never *is*, but it can, if asked properly

in the right framework given the right attitude using the right formalism, be known what it comprises, or is part of. That too is questionable. Does it make sense to ask? What do I mean when I ask? Do I know enough to ask sensibly? What do I know? What am I sure to know? That which is true for me and the world. But I cannot know of the world. What then can I possibly know that is true in the world? What am I sure of? The past? The world? The present?

Jess saw Edward going around in circles, revolving around the circumlocution of reasoning. Spinning around and around, but moving slowly inward, toward the center of what we call truth, never getting there, but somehow closer and closer, approaching the theory of everything, cold, austere, but significant. He's thinking about it again. What does this mean, what does that mean. What can I know, when can I know it. Should do this, should do that. Then, he'll come up with some great discovery (great at least for now) and scramble to his room, tripping over rocks, books, plates, and Evelyn, grab his precious little notebook, and start writing furiously on this and that, thinking meanwhile, to himself, what a great idea it is, what an excellent, central idea, how it ties everything together into some organic whole that no one has ever thought of before. Then next day he'll forget all about it and be as good as new. He'll open up his little notebook and, reading what he wrote, wonder which little devil scribbled all over his notes, for he'll find the words foreign, the writing urbane, the ideas simple, and the morals trivial. Then he'll whimper again and start going round and round again, tracing out the trajectory toward full understanding, repeating this argument, restating that problem, jumping to conclusions, writing in his notes. And he's back where he started, next to Waldo, sleeping on the grass.

"Dinner time!" she called out. Waldo waked with a start and flew into the dinning room. Edward was going back and forth still, thinking about this, looking at that, circling around the center that crept slowly forward into the house. Ben, Shree, Rhee, Becky, Flow, Rye, Evelyn, and Jeanette were seated. Caesar and Castleau circled around Mrs. Beisy. Tiff and Vicki were no where to be found. Bit by bit the pieces came together, even Edward. Jess went to get old man Kessing, who came slowly on his crutches (but faster than Edward). Caesar and Castleau finally sat down. Tiff and Vicki showed up, one in a dirty shirt full of holes, one in an elegant blouse without a stain. Everyone sat down in their usual place around the old mahogany table. Lights flashed in symmetric, perpendicular directions. Air swirled around the faces, painting each with its own pallor, distinguishing the one

from the other, but slowly pairing the opposites into wholes. Piece by piece the picture came together. It fit exactly, with no approximation, nothing missing. And Edward saw, and Jess saw, that all were one.

First dinner

“It’s a shame they shut down the path to Penthesilia.” Anger and disgust; why now? Some lame excuse to trap us here for ages. “I bet you it’s nothing; they just want to be careful and protective and polite.” I want out! Why don’t they just keep us here forever so we’ll never see the real world. I don’t care; anything but here. It’s time for the day.

Tiff exaggerates like a good old maid whose master murmurs, patience, my child, patience. Things happen and things happen and to the brave comes the fearsome, to the beautiful the hideous, to the lively the subdued. “They could very well have come up with a better excuse than that, heh?”

Excuse? That was no excuse. They’re just sitting there, ruining all our fun. I want out! “I don’t care. I’m just gonna walk right past them tomorrow. See what they could do to me?” Not a single thing, because I’m strong and able and glory and adventure will come to me.

“May be we should head over to the port tomorrow instead . . .” So much better than confronting those men. Anything but that again. “We could have so much fun at the port. We could pick sea shells and bring them back for Evelyn’s collection. Then we could . . .” What else? What else? “Go swimming.” Well . . .

Good maid the second. Swimming every single day, boy, Tiff will love that. “Let’s go to the port to . . . walk!” What an idea! Things happen again and again and to the mundane comes the extraordinary. May be I’m missing something here. Swimming, swimming; people could start kicking each other, injuring themselves. Oh no, it could get bloody. “Becky, you don’t think there are sharks, lying around? They get testy you know. Especially during the end of the summer, when the flesh start mellowing away, the food supply getting scarce with each day.”

They passed around the shark meat. Castleau found it very tasty.

“You should be ashamed, Castleau. Scaring your fellow neighbors.” He’s always doing this, never thinking about his future. “Look at Becky and Tiff, their faces are all red with anger.” Or pale with disgust. Hmm it’s already seven. Just fifteen minutes more. I have to shut Castleau up though, for fear

of his making someone cry before long. If he does it again, I'm gonna knock on his skull. Then may be he'll learn.

Always serious like a good old master, ticking his clock, measuring his pace, never a second too late, nothing could be wrong. I won't defy him today. He'll learn his lesson some day. Then he'll know: there is no such thing as perfection, much less goodness. To the brave the fearsome, to the peaceful the disquieting. I'll try something else. "Well look at Tiff, her face burning with desire!"

What, what? I wasn't looking. I was just glancing. How'd he know anyways? "What are you talking about? I'm perfectly distressed." Oh, what am I doing? I might as well leave, get out. It's time for the day. "They really must be just guarding nothing there. No one ever comes out."

"That is because they are guarding it." Ran a quick chuckle.

I guarded Aunt Beisy's apple pie and always only two slices are left when she gets back. Oh well, it can't be helped. I hope Tiff knows this; otherwise, she'll know soon enough. What is everyone doing? Don't we all know we must be done with sometime. Oh well, we'll know soon enough. Nothing really lasts, except things. So things should be. I must get back to my sea shells. "I'm done."

Edward glanced over and caught her thought. Yes, and she knows, as we all must sometime know, but can live with or without. *We cannot tear out a single page of our life, but we can throw the whole book in the fire.* On the other hand, we can rewrite the last 250 pages or so if we're clever enough. There was some truth in that despair once, but nothing eternal. And so we find a new way to deal with the truth that is before our eyes. Is it true that life is a despair and a ruin and we're only too young to know all the ghastly details and too naive to think earnestly about everything in it? On the other hand, there is the day to get past. And if you get past it, you might as well get something out of it. I will certainly make a note of this. Perhaps I can help when the time comes.

Waldo flew across the living room, free from the usual constraints and finding himself suddenly pleased to do what he wants – at least for now.

"I want to go to the port! I want to go to the port!" If I insist, people will want to go. "I'll race you swimming, sideways." I'm a shark, I'm a shark. So I'll win for sure. Jump! "Seize the moment! Let's go to the port."

It's a terrible surprise that he didn't quite find that port idea boring. I sure did. "I think I'll stay here and read tomorrow." Why did they drag me along today anyhow? Not entirely with my consent. I would much rather

have finished Swift than go. Penthesilia, Penthesilia, everyone cried, like they haven't been there before. If they had stayed here and look through the old volumes they would have found everything they'll ever need and more than enough. Well, I'm not them and they're not me.

"You really should finish your meal first before you go." Waiting to get back to your sea shells, heh? I know. Dinner is, however, first. Let us do that which is first, and things that come after will be first in their own time. I wished he wouldn't speak about not joining us; it's not proper for him not to go. "You can bring your books with you, right?" Let's just all go to the port. Let's watch Penthesilia from the port.

"I'm ready. I'm done. Look." Food doesn't stay in my stomach anyways. That's why we have a digestive track, and a appendix. Oh well, I'll stay put. What some ten minutes more anyways. I wish they would neglect me sometime. If I don't say anything, may be no one would notice if I just sneak silently away.

What is this with Tiff and Castleau? Is Tiff hiding something. I should find out. And if Castleau is just being a nut, I'll knock on his skull. Then may be he'll learn.

"No, I think I would rather not go tomorrow. I really don't feel like being active. You guys have fun without me. I would likely become a burden to some of you any how. It is better for me to stay." Besides, I have to look out for Aunt Beisy's apple pie. Everyone neglects to consider the clever cat we have in the house. Everytime people fail to protect the pie, they think Caesar or Tiff or Castleau ate it, when in fact, it is the trusty cat, who has grown fat on the sugar we feed him. For his own good and for the good of our taste buds, I will protect our food from him. I will do this by reading in the kitchen. Jess still thinks he is sleeping like a puppy everyday – he'll starve if we don't feed him something. May be she already knows; how could anyone not like Waldo? "I could look after the apple pie tomorrow until you guys get back."

"You aren't going to have it all yourself are you?" Ran another quick chuckle.

Oh does Ben know? Stupid Castleau, putting me in a hole. Oh love is so hard. I'll have to go. They can't keep me here forever. One day I'll see the real world, and adventure, and glory. Ben, come with me. We will go. Anything but here. That Castleau; I'll punish him someday, making fun of everybody. I hope he hates me. "Castleau, pass that salt fish, would you?"

"Sure." She wants me to hate her. Well, have a nice life. She has no idea

where I am, beyond. The lovely and disgusting smell of old, raw, hideous salted fish. Add the beautiful and drab smell of stinking, wrinkled, ugly sea weed tomorrow. I look forward to it with alarming dismay. Hey I get to swim. May be I'll start side-lining some people with my rough side-arm. Little guy, you like it sideways? Get this. Things happen and happen. I really must start thinking. Who is really my kind? Vicki is my kind. She is a dreamer, a follower of destiny. She is pretty. She must know?

"You will be here to make sure I don't right? You are always here." Hmm may be I was wrong about Waldo. May be old Kessing eats all of the pie. Jess must know for she cooks them. That is why she never gets mad at Waldo. I will stay here tomorrow and I will find out for myself. It isn't for much good, but a casual curiosity never fails to amuse itself. But then Kessing is so thin. Where did the pie go? Waldo has a much larger capacity for it than Kessing. Or perhaps Kessing never gets enough of it? There must be some biological principle I can pull out somewhere. Is it in the medicinal section? No, they must have moved it to the basement. No one looks at those books any more; it is a shame.

He will try to get out of this one. "I really think you should come with us. What are you going to do at home? There isn't a thing around. Enjoy the sun outside." I tried my hardest to keep us together but we'll see. Shree is different from the rest of us. He has something he wants to find out and it will take him the rest of his life to find it.

I will enjoy the sun inside. "I graciously decline." May be they should take Waldo with them. Then I would not have to guard the pie. I could find that old book on biological satiation. Perhaps I will finish Swift first. Then there is that modern abstract algebra and physical chemistry. It really will take me the rest of my life to grasp it all, I suppose. I will start again tomorrow then.

"So we're going to the port tomorrow?" I'll catch big fish for dinner. Bam, like a thunderbolt. Slam, you're mine. Big red fish.

They passed around the red fish. Caesar really liked it.

"Can you get me some fish?" I wished I didn't have to ask. But I am such and cannot be changed. I will be the first to do everything, even if I can't manage it on my own. I will, I can. Look that fish is smiling at me. She is dead and she smiles. She can't do a thing and she smiles, for she can, and she will, just as if she is alive. There are only some things that one is not alive can do. They say – don't expect so much, you're not expected to manage on your own, do what you can. But even if I'm half alive, I will

strive for it all, for what anyone can do I can do, even if it takes me forever. "Thanks, I can manage."

I wish I were like her, taking everything with the serenity of perfect control. I cannot be you, but I will help you. Do what you can, dear, and I will further it. It will not take you forever if I'm your arms and legs. "I will take you to the port tomorrow." And I will see to it that you get your fish.

"Evelyn, get back here. You know you shouldn't leave the table until everyone is finished." Got caught red-handed. Now I'll never be able to go until I sit through it all. What, seven more minutes?

Yes, I will be your arms and legs Perhaps I shouldn't have suggested going to the port. Jeanette might get easily injured trying to step over the pebbles on the beach. And there are so many people there with axes to grind. I will have to be extra watchful, for Jeanette might try to do things on her own. At least Caesar and Evelyn will be happy. I wish Shree would go and not stick himself in the library. Oh Tiff worries me. She's so restless lately. I'll let Jess know. She'll take care of it.

Ah Becky, you're so good to me. I don't know what I can do without your arms and legs. "Thanks, I can manage."

She is beauty. Oh Jess what do you do with your beauty, with the admiration you garner, the praise you receive, the extraordinary look that defies everything. What is it like to sit next to the most beautiful of all living beings? Jess, I yearn for your beauty. I wish I can have it. I will try and I will change myself, but I will never be quite as beautiful as you, Jess.

"What are you staring at, Vicki?" Admiring the wind, the air, the waves? Dreaming of eternal sacrifice? Ah, Vicki pretty, you are my kind. We are meant to be the same. Do you not know? What do you know?

He is her peer. Oh Edward what do you do with your thoughts? I want to share them with you, but you never let me. If I am Jess, then would you love me? No, but I am not Jess. I will go away, just like Tiff, but I will come back. Then you will see me changed. I will be what I always wanted to be. "Oh, nothing. Just thinking about the port tomorrow."

"So you're going as well? Count me in, Becky. Shree, are you *sure* you don't want to go? hehe." Anything to be near Vicki. Things really happen; to the brave comes the reward, to the patient comes the prize. I must think about what I say. Vicki, you are my destiny! Too formal. Vicki, you and I, we're like brother and sister. Too mundane. Vicki, love is a beautiful thing. Too suggestive. Vicki, a man almost never gets what he wants (especially if the man is still a boy). Way too suggestive. Vicki, the flowers fall on your

lovely face. Too indirect. Vicki, you and I, we think alike. Too intellectual. Vicki, tell me what you are thinking. And perhaps I will think for you.

“I am not going. May be you guys should take old Kessing along. He hasn’t exercised in decades.” Ha, keep chuckling, old one. Who will have the pie now? I will be its first protector. Hm, I should dig up some ancient recipes and make something of a surprise for Aunt Beisy. Blue-sauced salman? Chocolate cream pancakes? Stuffed bell peppers? Gosh, what is this I’m eating?

Oh Jess, how do you deal with your beauty? Not one person should not fall in love with you. How can you be yourself when so many are near you? Oh I’m sitting next to Venus. How shall I behave? “Can I get you that salman, Jess?”

Jess glanced over and caught her thought. Though nothing happened, the moment stopped, gracefully. Jess saw and was satisfied. Like the waking sea, we dream rapidly and never stopping to breathe. Then it all comes and we ask why. Why should it be so, why should not be this or that? Can I not find the ultimate cause? But it is so. We are beings too fine to know that which is destined for us. We can only venture to guess and make empty predictions now and then. But what are we really? What am I really? What am I in other’s eyes? Am I a woman? Am I a care-taker? Am I a creature? But now I know. I see Vicki and I know, for I am, still am, a woman. And I can only be a woman for what I want is not heard, but grasped at faintly. But I do have my wants. I will do it. I will let it be known. To myself first shall it be known. What I am in other’s eyes I shall become; but I am more, and more to be expressed than I have years to express it. Vicki! Let me give you a piece of myself. Let me be known. Oh why does it have to be hard to grasp? Where is that which is simple and reflexive, yet is willed and destined? When shall I find that? Can I live a life with myself as center and yet be part of the world, living and breathing in the midst of its subtleties, flying in the faces and minds of others, dreaming a dream that is real and is known. Can I be more than myself, but a light in the lighthouse, a beacon for all to see? Then I can say I am, and they will say you are. Here I am again and again, with the living breathing waves about me, conjecturing what I am, what I can be. Am I transported, but not away? I will find what I am looking for. I will find it here. When I find it, I shall finally be the one I am, and I will fight off the one I am not. Vicki! Let me be as I am and you will be as I am.

Edward glanced over and caught her thought. Us orphans of the storm,

dreaming always of what could be when the impulse for destruction ceases to satisfy itself. There is no disruption of continuity; there is but one eternally moving stream. Things break down to their atomic, unstable self: the realness of things a moving stream of will and idea. Us orphans of the storm, tightening our grips upon ourselves, so that we can be what we are and nothing more. But then the impulse of destruction awaits, for it lurks hidden and well-behaved for ages, only to grasp our body and mind when the moment comes, and declare to the world that it has come to finish what others left off. But does it exist? There is no necessary existence for the counter-will. Fight the world!? Then fight thy self. Fight off the one you are not. Be as others would have you be, but let others have you be yourself. Us orphans of the storm, living in a confused, past and present world, full of hope, glory, triumph, and yet of despair, tragedy, defeat. What is life? For the umpteenth time, what is it?

Edward almost cried out aloud. What can he be thinking? About Jess? About me? About himself? About existence? “Edward, are you ok?” Let me share your thoughts. Let me heal your wounds and suffer your pains. Please, Edward. Oh Edward what do you do with your thoughts? I’m growing old fast. Let me share your heart before it is too late.

“Evelyn, I thought I told you to stay at the table.” Darn, five more minutes. Oh well.

“Oh, I’m fine.”

They passed around the fruit cake. Edward really liked it.

What can I be thinking next? What else can I say? The fertile moon shines melancholy upon the blank, virgin earth. The receding darkness pauses over the rising light. The conquering goodness of the will against the piteous tragedy of the flesh. Good bad; black white; more less; up down; fast slow; big small; fair hideous; that is what all things are; that is all; contrasts of contrasts. “I would have loved Penthesilia.”

“You really shouldn’t think about it any more.” Penthesilia is part of the past. Now, let us go to the port. It’s not proper to dwell on the past. Let us do that which is next, and things that come before have come and gone in their own time. I wished she wouldn’t be so nostalgic; it’s not proper to yearn for the impossible. “We could always go after they finish.” Let’s have fun at the port tomorrow.

“Yeah, let’s go to Penthesilia!” Move forward; seize the moment. Don’t cry about it; get a move on. We’re flying mercenaries. Move it.

Old maid Rye is at it again; thinking out the duality of this and that;

making a career out of contrasts. Things happen and to each comes her own. Why stuff yourself? I'm with Vicky all the way. Penthesilia? It shall come in its own time. I wonder what type of emotion does Vicky possess inside. Perhaps I can be a sort of soul mate, a surveyor of subconscious desires and horrid sufferings. What can I do but be myself? "Penthesilia? I don't know. I've heard of a band of Don Juans there, seducing the richest, tenderest, loveliest women, leaving them without a cent, rid of all their property, souls, without an inch of cotton on their bodies. I tell ya, Penthesilia's got a lot of axe-grinders, swingers, robbers; you know, the kind that . . ."

"Pipe down, Castleau. There are no humans in Penthesilia." I'll knock his skull. I swear.

What more is there to say? What else can be done? Jacket of darkness envelops the pleasant aroma of the feathery light. Righteous crusaders of the lost grail fight the evil influence of decay. Strong weak; high low; light dark; knowledge ignorance; hot cold; that is what all things can be; all that is; legion of contrasts. "Penthesilia is my dream."

My dream is to possess my dream. Come to me; the void of everything. Those things will happen. To the ideal comes the counter-will. To the elegant comes the wreckage of monuments. I will possess it as I can. I will possess my kind. But yet, what more can be? Can I do more than void the serenity of existence? I must find a way.

Oh Waldo, I wished you wouldn't sleep soundlessly in your hole. It's not proper to sleep while others eat. You should wake up with a smile. Food should disturb his slumber.

They passed around the pudding. Waldo really liked it.

Time is up. Dinner is over. Fifteen minutes of reading awaits.

Edward glanced over and caught his thought. The impulse of destruction awaits us tomorrow. The beauty of existence will be challenged by the absurdity of the make-belief. Let us get past it and get something out of it. The serenity of life will be disturbed by the quickness of the kill. Yet all is continuity and none can perturb the flow of matter from one ideal situation to another, always remarking how light and easy it is to transition between the two, even when no one knows that the disruption is possible, or has happened. And yet it happens, without the slightest invocation on our part. So the great sun's death will die differently for once. The cycle of movement stopped by the moment. But no one will really know, for what can one know without question? What can we irrefutably, absolutely, incontrovertibly say? What is this all? For the umpteenth time, what is this all? What can I say?

That I possess this or that? That I know this or that? That I've done this or that? Yet all is continuity and serenity and crises are the same under one umbrella. The sun will die cautiously and wake up refreshed. I will die with it and come back transformed. Us who have never seen a human being in our realm, shall dream no more, but find the existence of a being nobler than us. Will I die with the discovery of light? Perhaps, but then there is tomorrow to get around, the tomorrow that will bring disquietude and horror, as life supposed it could.

Rhee left the table. Waldo sat up. It was time for bed.

The war

Ask what it may, the wind does not change its will, cannot be enticed, will not steer from its ultimate finale directed by its ultimate cause. When it finds a direction, that direction is the living breathing form of the various shapes and colors of the type that is the wind. Then it sails smooth without disruption from the low, modest interior to the clearing atop the grand, panoramic scene above mere mortality. Following the wind traces the path of that simplest ideal of humanity: to do that which one wills to do. But no one has, or can, follow the wind, for the wind blows itself, cannot be driven by some neighboring force. The wind is its ultimate cause. Sailing above the shaky house, around the lowly pastures, over the windy river, focused on the destination that tops the ranges. What the wind looks for is there, atop the tallest of the mountains, above the plateau, surrounded by clouds, all as one, one as all. What else am I, it cried. I am Castleau. I am Ben. I am Tiff. What can I be? Sitting and moving, looking and thinking, it stood anxiously awaiting. There among the highest of the pastures of the mountains, with the wind and its crouching past permeating the air, it stood and listened. How do I know? How can I see? A darkness flashed over the morning sky for an instant. Then the war began.

Edward stood looking sharply for a moment over the stand- still air trembling with the winds of darkness, a thunderous shriek of terror unheard. It is here. For a moment only the thought that was there clouded the sense of being briefly. Then it was not gone? It was not gone. It is here: the dual phantom of Penthesilia; a relic striving to engulf the tragic present. It is here to stay and the war has silently begun. Orphans, forgetful of the past, has found the key to unlock the treasure. No guardian of life can contain the

horror of yesterday, nor the horror of tomorrow. Slowly it begun. A flash of lightning dampened the air for a brief instant. Yesterday and tomorrow are here to stay. Despair and hope twist the silent pagoda of being – one tier of life at a time. What was this that we have never seen? It is neither darkness nor light, neither tragedy nor triumph, neither evil nor goodness. It is the coming of the recurrent war of present and past.

A complete blue whiteness with a mist over-hanging any ripple, like a fresh curtain. The morning, with lights, over-looking complete wrinkle-free water, a new clean slate written by none, ready to form a fresh circle around the first push and shove of the morning curtain covering elusive brightness with blankness of thought, faintness of ignorance, no idea, no dream, no pain. Then a poke, a spot of ink dappling over the liquid, a start. But the wave closes, current stops, for no spot can turn the curtain, spoil the freshness of calm, silent bliss that reigns over any ripple disturbing the perfect void. There is then nothing but smoothness of sheets, whiteness of air. We are at the port.

A faint spot is seen half over all times. An enigma to be discerned, real or imaginary? It is a stain. The waves echo the arrival of some relic of questionable color. It is not white. The void thus broken, who now describes the words, over- looks the sea? A faint spot that crawls slowly forward, inching its way left and right, elbowing the curtains around, though not away, scribbling awry, focusing in itself, creating and neglecting the after-shocks of sudden creation. It moved forward unawares and unconscious to all that barely perceived the mark, noting the rather annoying band of non-uniformity in a multitude of clean, cold, simple-minded non-existences that removed all doubts to its once omnipresent, and still disturbingly full power of absolute void. There was nothing until the faint spot that widened its coverage, spilling over the perfection, agitating the waters of a calm, motionless scene controlled by the expression of a single, unmistakable, unknowing sign that simply restates a mundane idea that lasts for all speakable time. That is, until now. Slowly, the young spot lurched its way forward, rambling over the inconsequential details of a decidedly nonexistent view-point. More and more it took shape: the picture of a mermaid, carved judiciously to tempt the eye; the tri-colored flag, flapping slowly or not at all, with the breeze dying down but never wholly gone; the beautifully elaborate rails that clung to the broad spot of geometry and professed its affiliation of a not so distant profusion of wealth; the maze of bodies on board, neither moving nor dead, scribbling notes of secret past upon the sands of the shore, lasting a

few pages of the history of civilization and its decline, only to be forgotten by the record-keeper, who notes the word but not the mood, and hence, the expressive will. Nonetheless, it lurched forward silently, gliding through the waves of resistance, pushing the curtains aside, marking its place in the pages of history with a bold, pugnacious stroke that cries out “I am here.” We are at the port.

Out of the ship climbed a haggard-looking young man about to pass out. Looking he was at the sun that blinded him, shield and mist and all, everyone else looking on, undoubtedly hopeful of adventure, fearful of its consequences, and striving to make the best of both worlds. Who were these bodies piled one upon another vertically supporting the mast by themselves? They appeared to be (like nothing we’ve seen before) dead men about to die forever. Who then is the lone survivor, standing tall against the sun, with no regret on his face, but a sense of tested despair? Is he a prophet from Penthesilia, bearing the fortunes of future struggles, warning us against some massive immigration beyond our control, saving us from despair and death? Does he bring joyful news from that far-away land, inscribed by the seal of a magnanimous king protecting the livelihoods of every citizen, even those he has never seen? Upon us he has come, traveling amidst danger and fighting the incredible forces of enemies unseen, until he, alone has survived. Tall against the sun, rising above all; the triumph of courage over the insurmountable rigors of a trial by fire. He has come to deliver us from our detriments? He brings news from our kind? What has this hero come for but us? We are saved by the prophecy of Penthesilia? I’ll certainly ask him.

“Who art thou?” The antiquarian one opened his mouth but could not speak. Falling to his knees as the ship came upon earth, he instinctively fell and touched the sand head-first. A faint voice could be heard as we lifted him up. A subtle voice that repeated the same maxim over and over again, with no other thought but this, echoing for eternity, for all to hear, so that no one could forget. How can we make it out? What seeketh thou? A young man grasping for breath, on the edge of chaos, is saved? All his companions onboard dead for some reason unknown except to him. How do we explain this phantom from the nether world, the first human to cross the unknown? What sayest thou?

“Never again! I begin anew. Never again! I begin anew. Never again! I begin anew . . .,” a whispery voice we heard. “What perils have thou been through?” we asked. “Never again! I begin anew,” we heard. “What current brings thou here to the place with no memory?” we asked. “Never again! I

begin anew,” we heard. No wounds, no blood, no pain, we saw. Yet despair beyond despair, he felt. No one survived, though all were healthy enough in body. No hunger, no thirst, no want, we examined. Yet all members of the expedition dead, except him. What strangeness aboard this ghost of a ship. Where shall it deliver us and to what cross purpose?

The young man stood up from the sand with no effort. We begin anew.

Chapter 2

New beginnings

Trauma

What I can do I shall perhaps not do. I love life itself but not its thoughts, which haunts me whenever change erupts. But no one can cover the eruption that grows infinitely often to spark the present. What can I do but linger along, drifting between moments of being and moments of absence. Then existence is not continuous; sometimes I am, sometimes I almost am, sometimes I am not, sometimes I neither am nor am not. Confusedly I sought illumination. I ask: what is it that moves me beyond myself, when I, for one, would be happy to stay within.

Perhaps I am made out of instabilities, dynamics so fine yet chaotic that all control is illusory. But what of coherent thought and language and expression? There must be some force that turns on and off whose switch awaits discovery. Interim, I am not wholly myself, but a mixture of physicality, desire, reason, what ever else of others that I perceive. Only now at this very moment of being am I myself. Yet even this fleeting moment vaporizes before I can grasp its truth and live in its completion. Yet again, I am haunted by none other than memory that accumulates through the slate of experience and through the ages of evolving ancestry: the memory that will not go away. Even as I speak, the flow of time drives the moment into my skull, cramming together the now and the past. Nothing is ever lost, but some things are forgotten. The moments forgotten haunts us in night and light, whenever it chooses to spread its enormous tentacles over whomever it chooses whenever it chooses. I cannot live with my own past, yet I am willing to live.

I cannot imagine what I can be without lying in the despair of what I am not.

Resolution

The old adage "just do it" summarizes the resolution at the ethical level. More precisely, given various alternative actions, one best maximizes her expected life utility by taking the best action found in the least amount of time. In practice, the problem of having to choose what to think about or do is difficult to optimize correctly. Inevitably, we are forced into either: 1. a mental loop reflecting on what was done or what can be done, or 2. taking the best action in the face of uncertainty.

This discussion has necessarily been focusing on the mathematical (or at least analytical) nature of the problem and its solution, for analytics is mentally associated with the need to do good (that is, to optimize). I claim that there is a non-analytic approach that relates to our daily existence. In life, we are confronted by new experiences, needs, desires, difficulties, uncertainties, novelties, etc., all of which contribute to the acquisition of knowledge. Memory and attention play important roles in deciding how we process this information. It is easy to lose oneself in pure reflection or pure imagination that attempts to organize this information. This I refer to as the mental loop. The loop is detrimental when it takes over practical activities. Reading is most susceptible to the force of the loop because it involves some of the same mechanisms of action: mental imagery, verbal processing, attention, etc. To overcome the loop, however, one must do the simplest of all possible things: taking action.

On the philosophical level, we reckon that life itself is a loop: one moment we are lost and helpless, another moment (like now) we are enlightened and refreshed. How then can we ensure that what we learn today can possibly be retained tomorrow? Two answers. First, it is difficult to say if all is lost. While some part of the mind processed this new "enlightened" information, the same part of the mind may be secondary in everyday processing on a later date. Hence all knowledge may be retained, but we must mine for it. Moreover, some corrupted knowledge may linger, despite our attempt to rid of or transform them. Second, the human mind may be fragile, but the physical medium is not. What you are looking at is the power of the physical human force. In effect all of history's art, literature, science, etc. attest to

the extension of the human mind to inanimate objects. The paper in which you write your notes is an extension of you, and may be considered a part of you, or a part of your sphere of influence. In some sense, we can regard an individual as the collection of her experience throughout her lifetime as manifested in the consequences of her actions (physical, communicational, psychological, or otherwise). Therefore, while loops seem to be occurring (a la Nietzsche), they are really manifestations of our (as yet) coarse methods of preserving knowledge. What appears to be the inability to change is remnant of the anxiety associated with slow change. For we examine more closely our vices than our virtues. Even change is subject to the simple axiom of action. There is really no mental/physical/communal obstacle to any possible action, except that which is created by the mental loop.

Recall that the solution is simply to take action. This action is not just any rash action; it is the best action from one's frame of reference. For your entire life, you have been struggling with the idea of simply doing exactly what you want. When the solution comes, it is always the simple adage of simply doing what you intended as best. This is often mixed up with what you thought was best and what you seem to desire as best. These are difficult choices to make. The only suggestion I can offer here is that, whatever you do, more mental loops will not solve the optimization problem. Hence, it is best simply to do what you think is best. None of this deliberation over what ought to be the plan of attack for deciding the best, etc. are irrelevant to your everyday existence, especially in the case where doing something is a necessity. In that case, no deliberation is necessary and one should simply take action. Moreover, deliberation is seldom necessary. The deliberation of the form identified as the mental loop is never necessary.

Two main problems remain. The first is to identify instances of mental loop. For example, revising an essay is not a mental loop even though it involves much staring and stylistic gymnastics. Irrelevant recalling of the past, on the other hand, is a mental loop. The second problem is to ensure that one remembers the solution in one's everyday life. This is only difficult when one forgets constantly what the solution is and, instead of recalling it, begins to wonder about irrelevant details that hints at what could be (but never is) better. It helps to have a good memory, but the more important element is to exercise the solution by putting it in action.