

Writing Myself In

**an essay and a story
by**

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10/12/24 edition

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Author's Note

This book includes two pieces: One is a sci-fi type story I wrote based on a vivid dream that seemed to me to mandate my trying to write it up. A writer-friend I shared it with felt it read more like “soliloquy” than story and that the next revision step should be to “write yourself out.” My response to that observation, which started as a short email, is the essay that now precedes and introduces my “story.” And that’s how these two very different things ended up together in this book.

[Bibliographic information for quoted material appears in the text, often with direct links, rather than as a separate Works Cited page.]

Writing Myself In

1.

Last spring I wrote a piece of “fiction” (I put the term in quotation marks to signal the way that designation ultimately became arguable, which is what this essay will be about) based on a dream I had, one that seemed to me to insist on my writing it up. It is the first and most likely the last piece of fiction I will ever write. Given my strange relationship with time, I have no instinctive narrative sense, at least not in the conventional ways that Western culture indoctrinates us into; and, perhaps because of my generally asocial nature, I have no “ear” for creating authentic sounding dialogue, those two bulwarks of fiction (without the quotation marks) as we know it. What I wrote has what I characterized at the time as a “sci-fi” aspect, in that it is set in the future (about a century and a half forward) and describes a worldwide catastrophe that technology causes rather than attempts to prevent. I don’t read and don’t much like sci-fi as a literary genre, so the degree to which that characterization is apt is also arguable. Thus the quotation marks again. I sent it out to a couple of sci-fi mags I found via a Google search (which tells you how little I know about that marketplace) with no luck. It is now the second half of this book.

Readers of the piece, mostly friends and family, which is the audience for my works-in-progress, found it to be either enlightening or aggravating. I’ll start here with one of the latter responses and, I hope, wend my way ultimately toward the former, even if it’s only or primarily mine. I have lunch about once every two months with a friend I met through a local poetry group. At our last get-together she said that she, too, had written a sci-fi story (no quotation marks), so we agreed to share our respective efforts. Hers was good, a vividly imagined futuristic piece with invented alien humanoid creatures, a narrative line that documented an adventuresome and

dangerous journey, and plenty of pretty good dialogue. The real thing. I wrote my response with a few tentative suggestions. Tentative because, as I said, I know next to nothing about writing fiction or about the conventions of sci-fi.

Her initial response to mine, in the midst of her reading, was a bit edgy, indicating the difficulty she was having navigating my typically circuitous prose. About a week later I got this more detailed email, which is what led to this essay:

I did read it carefully, and went back over the beginning. Your prose is very elegant, and it is a well thought out what shall I say-'Soliloquy'. Or even a journal, as opposed to a short story. There is much that is yourself, but we all do that. Was it Tolstoy who said "First you have to write yourself out"?

Have you actually submitted it anywhere? I would be very interested in the so-called professional feedback. Anyway keep writing.

The “professional feedback” I got from the two mags to which I submitted it was “No, thank you.” So very little to report there. And, of course, as this piece demonstrates, I will “keep writing,” hopefully things well-thought-out rendered in elegant prose. The part of her commentary that got me thinking toward what I’m writing here is that middle section, where she struggles first to name what I actually do—soliloquy or journal, both fair characterizations, though I might prefer something like meditation—which raises all sorts of very interesting questions about genre as both a facilitative and hegemonic force for determining not so much what gets written but what can reasonably expect to find a way into the general marketplace, a longstanding bugaboo of mine, which I’ll get to later.

I want to start, though with these two sentences:

There is much that is yourself, but we all do that. Was it Tolstoy who said "First you have to write yourself out"?

My first two reactions were, yes, there is much (as in everything) that is “myself” in the piece, as there always is when I write, a matter of both intention and pride. And when and why did Tolstoy ever say that? As to the latter: A few Google searches turned up no evidence that either he or anyone else ever said that. Which is not to say that he/someone didn’t say it. But if they did I could not disagree with them any more fervently than I do now and have for my entire life. When I imagined “writing myself out” of the piece in question, there would nothing left but the title. That is of course the nature of a “soliloquy,” “journal,” and meditation. Take away the voice that conveys their selfness and there is nothing left but silence.

Here's the response I wrote in the heat of this moment:

I appreciate your diligence in the face of my complexity. Your comment from Tolstoy was a revelation to me. I have spent my career, my whole life, both creative and scholarly, working earnestly to write myself in not out, and trying to persuade others, including my students, to do that as well. I'm so happy that I did! Sooner or later, most of the good things I wrote found an outlet, and a good reception. And my teaching was transformative for many young minds. I have no desire or reason to change that ambition now. The marketplace will likely resist my tendencies quite forcefully, as it always has, for its own good reasons. I have no problem with that. I would like, but don't now need, anything the marketplace has to offer.

Tolstoy's comment is, I can see, especially pertinent to fiction writing as a genre, which may be why I never practiced

it. As you make clear, even in this instance, I haven't! Again, no problem to me. If I wrote myself out of my piece, it would simply disappear. It does exactly what I set out to do with it. The marketplace will take it or leave it, as it has every right to do. I'll just let the process unfold in its preferred way over the coming months and years and await the outcome.

In the end, I sent a much briefer and more perfunctory note of thanks for the readerly attention, in part because I felt this more substantial reply would be pointless, given our radically different notions about why writers write and what a piece of writing should aspire toward. So, the conundrum I'll be interested in here is this writing-yourself-in-or-out at the heart of our disagreement.

A bit of advice/fair warning in advance: If you are one of those readers who fully endorse the “write yourself out” approach, stop right now! This essay will just piss you off. It is, in fact, I can see now rereading the first full draft, even more ardently myself-oriented than my “story” is! Likewise, if you start a section and become quickly aggravated by trying to fathom how in the world what I'm writing about could possibly relate to the “theme” of the essay, stop and move to the next, and so on, until you find one more amenable to your taste. I won't mind at all, if it will keep you going toward the last section, where I finally come back to my story-that-is-not-a-story. And then, if you're still interested and have the time, read the story.

2.

I want to go back a ways to get on the runway toward my story by looking at the “myself” in this equation more as a cultural than autobiographical marker. About 25 years ago I

was teaching a Senior Seminar on the “long poem” in American literature. We were in the midst of reading *Gunslinger*, the final text in the syllabus, that weirdly wild epic Ed Dorn wrote mostly drug addled in the late-60s. The students found parts of it frustratingly difficult to process. Here’s a passage that one of them pointed to one day as especially baffling:

*The Ego
is costumed as the road manager
of the soul, every time
the soul plays a date in another town
I goes ahead to set up
the bleachers, or book the hall
as they now have it,
the phenomenon is reported by the phrase
I got there ahead of myself
I got there ahead of my I
is the fact
which now a few anxious mortals
misread as institution. The Tibetans
have a treatise on that subjection.
Yet the sad fact is I is
part of the thing
and can never leave it.
This alone constitutes
the reality of ghosts.
Therefore I is not dead.*

<https://gravyfromthegazebo.blog/2016/01/05/edward-dorn-gunslinger-1-2/>

What, this student wondered, is he doing with “I” here? It makes no sense, even at the level of pronoun-verb agreement. For anyone who had read postmodernist critical theory, as I had, and been around during the late-60s, as I had,

the sort of discombobulation of the “I” that Dorn indexes seems routine. But my students were novices with the former and weren’t there for the latter. So I had to think fast.

I decided spontaneously to offer the class of brief “history” of the hypertrophic “I” that is a signature of Western culture, something I had given some piecemeal thought to over the years but had never put together in quite this way. Just by happenstance, I can’t remember why, I had recently read the section of the Old Testament that documents Moses’ first conversation with God, the burning bush incident on Mount Sinai, the one where God calls on him to lead his/His people out of Egypt. The manner of their negotiation with one another seemed to me on this reading to have an almost comic aspect, so that’s where I started my commentary. Here’s how their “introduction” opens:

But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?”

And God said, “I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain.”

Moses said to God, “Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ Then what shall I tell them?”

God said to Moses, “I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I am has sent me to you.’”

...

*“This is my name forever,
the name you shall call me
from generation to generation.”*

...

Moses answered, “What if they do not believe me or listen to me and say, ‘The Lord did not appear to you?’”

[Here God teaches Moses a few miracle-type “signs” to impress on his people that a force with some considerable mojo is behind him]. . .

Moses said to the Lord, “Pardon your servant, Lord. I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue.”

The Lord said to him . . . “Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say.”

But Moses said, “Pardon your servant, Lord. Please send someone else.”

Then the Lord’s anger burned against Moses and he said, “What about your brother, Aaron the Levite? . . . You shall speak to him and put words in his mouth; I will help both of you speak and will teach you what to do.”

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Exodus%203%3A11-14&version=NIV>

I narrated the gist (not the exact copy, of course) of this encounter focusing on the dynamics of the naming process in their introduction, that exchange of the two “I am”s, which is both like and unlike the one we use when we meet a new acquaintance. First of all, God, who is omniscient, already knows Moses’ name, that individual moniker we just take for granted as a personal identity marker, the one we are assigned at birth and that inscribes our biography until we die. Moses is just not sure God has a clear idea of who his I am is in terms of doing this thing He is asking of him. So coming to a mutual understanding takes some back and forth, a matter of persuasion on God’s part and acceptance on Moses’. Key to that, from Moses’ point of view, is feeling confident that he can introduce God to his people in such a way that they’ll believe all of this, the burning bush, the visitation, the call to action, all

of which, he fears, will sound highly improbable absent the sort of authorization a proper name provides.

God proffers his “first name,” “I am,” assuming that should be enough. As in, “you are Moses, I am I am, end of story.” Moses seems befuddled, as in “of course you are you; I am me, too. What sort of a name is that, anyway?” God gets a bit aggravated that Moses has forgotten his “last name,” that “Who I am,” which, even Moses should be smart enough to see, differentiates God’s “am-ness” absolutely from his. God’s “Who I am” is a “forever” name, outside of history and time, unlike Moses’ which is contingent and provisional. When Moses further resists God’s call, claiming rhetorical ineptitude, God promises to speak eloquently through him (perhaps with the help of Aaron) all of which reinforces the idea that Moses’ “I am” is clearly not in the same league as God’s.

The point I wanted to make was that right at the outset of what we consider the Western tradition, a bifurcation of the “I” is founded: one (ours) is corporeal, diurnal, contingent and temporal; the other (God’s) is ethereal, eternal, permanent and atemporal. In this initial iteration they are radically dissociated from one another. The twain may in fact meet occasionally, as they do that day on Mount Sinai, or in rare moments of vision and transcendence, but they are not co-substantial. This division of Being created some significant philosophical problems in the Western tradition: I.e., “If I am not God and God is not me what if anything makes me different from that animal, or that stone, or that star?” How we got from that awkward introduction to the stereotypical body/soul binary that Christians take for granted now is a long and convoluted tale. I know a lot more about that now than I did back then, so here’s the *Spark Notes* version of part of that history. I’ll get back to my class presentation shortly.

Most Indigenous cultures operate within broadly animistic systems, myself, nature and god(s) interanimate with one

another, which is what makes their earthly “footprints” so eco-friendly. Eastern spiritual traditions, from well back into the 1st century BCE, orchestrate those three pillars similarly as a mutually reflexive unity. In the *Upanishads* for example the term that is usually translated into English as “self” is used interchangeably to reference individual human identity, God, and the universe we inhabit. Taoism and Buddhism follow the same template. Even in the Old Testament, all living beings have some kind of “soul” (with many variations of what its afterlife might be); the word for soul (nephesh), is often translated as being, life, me, you, heart, people, and creature.

The 6th and 5th century BCE pre-Socratics used the concept of the soul primarily to name the life force, not only in humans but in animals and plants, every living thing. They came up with a variety of mechanisms to explain how it dissipated once the body died. At least one of them, Pythagoras, attributed some durable post-death aspect to it, an immortality via transmigration, the sort of reincarnation cycle typical to Eastern systems and, later, to some of the classical Greek philosophers. Plato for example, or at least Socrates, his primary mouthpiece, offers a variety of arguments on behalf of a soul that survives the body: as an intelligence or logos (the *Phaedo*), a moral force (the *Republic*) or the medium for reincarnation (the *Phaedrus*.)

The soul as an eternal God-endowed spirit begins to gel in the New Testament. Jesus uses the term soul that way, at least in most English translations. And he clearly operates on some notion of an eternal afterlife, as evidenced by his conversation with the criminal being crucified with him on that fateful Friday. Paul, whose system is informed by Hellenistic concepts, uses the Greek term *psyche* most often to name this separable entity. Early Christian scriptures—the synoptic gospels, John’s gospel, and the many gnostic gospels “lost” for 1500 years—proffer a smorgasbord of options within this matrix. It wasn’t

until the 4th and 5th century consolidation of Catholicism as the one true Church that most of what we think about heaven, eternal life, body and soul, got settled, at least generally. Okay, now back to our regular programming, that day in front of my class 20-some years ago.

I then jumped a millennium or so ahead to another famous example of the “I am” problematic, the one Descartes’ renders in his *Discourse on Method* (1637), the famous “*Cogito ergo sum*: I think therefore I am” trope familiar to almost everyone. Again, I emphasized the built in bifurcation of this identity-center-I. Descartes’ “I am” is different from Moses’s “I am” in that he internalizes what had previously been an external bifurcation. There are still two “I”s in this equation, but both are now mine: I think and I am in some sort of elaborate causal dance, the former with an ethereal aspect, the latter with a human face. Not quite Moses and God or body and soul, but in the same dojo.

Descartes becomes queasy pretty quickly with the spiritual implications of this, understanding that this “I-am”-generating “I think” might be mistakenly presumed as equivalent to God’s and become a portal for demons to jump in and wreak some havoc; so he puts the brakes on, reasserting God as the overseer for this divided entity we inhabit, the thinking part associated with “mind” the am-ing part associated “body,” or maybe its vice-versa, I’m not sure, always both intimate and at odds with one another. This internal bifurcation of the “I” has persisted in the paradigmatic structure of Western epistemology ever since.

I turned then to Coleridge’s famous definition of the primary imagination from his *Biographia Literaria* (1817), one the students were familiar with because I had talked about it previously. Coleridge says:

The primary IMAGINATION I hold to be the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM.

<https://www.sjsu.edu/faculty/harris/StudentProjects/Laset/Biographia.htm>

This is, I told them, a pretty radical upgrade from Descartes, indicating that human perception itself, the everyday ways we process our relationship with reality, and not simply artistic production, which is the province of gifted artists, is profoundly creative, the “finite” “repetition” of God’s “act of creation,” one that, at least as I read it (and there are those who disagree, including Coleridge himself, later in life, when he backed off this claim considerably) accords to our being-in-the-world as sentient creatures the power to summon up *as if* from nothing the world that God originally summoned *directly* into being from nothing. That’s a lot of swag!

To illustrate the extent of these powers I then quoted from memory the final stanza of Coleridge’s great poem “Kubla Kahn,” which says this:

*A damsel with a dulcimer
In a vision once I saw:
It was an Abyssinian maid
And on her dulcimer she played,
Singing of Mount Abora.
Could I revive within me
Her symphony and song,
To such a deep delight ’twould win me,
That with music loud and long,
I would build that dome in air,
That sunny dome! those caves of ice!*

*And all who heard should see them there,
And all should cry, Beware! Beware!
His flashing eyes, his floating hair!
Weave a circle round him thrice,
And close your eyes with holy dread
For he on honey-dew hath fed,
And drunk the milk of Paradise.*

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43991/kubla-khan>

Just listen, I said, to what this says, quite literally, about creative perception. First of all, at least in this case, it is vested in music rather than words, a surprising turn for a poet to take. Second of all, if he could “revive” that vaguely remembered music (which seems plausible to me), he could “build [Kahn’s] dome in air.” And “all who heard should see” “that sunny dome! those caves of ice!” (exclamation points warranted!) right “there” before their eyes. The whole thing, physically extant. There! In the air! Again, that’s some pretty impressive swag for one to carry around in one’s “I am.”

Then I turned to Walt Whitman, whose “Song of Myself” we started the semester with, a poem that opens with the “I” celebrating its expression as “myself.” Whitman goes on to metastasize that I/myself in myriad ways, claiming finally to “contain multitudes.” Throughout the poem his myself morphs into all kinds of other people, animals, plants, things of every sort, not just descriptively but manifestly. If you let yourself go, as he does, it is such a thrilling ride, one that invites even cajoles you to abandon any simplistic notion of the unitary “I” in favor of one that is even more “esemplastic” than the one Coleridge invented that word to describe.

I finished on a more playful note, with Popeye the sailor man, one of my childhood heroes, whose famous tag line I took fully to heart: “I am what I am and that’s all what I am,” an assertion that closely mirrors the one God himself uses to name

himself for Moses! Popeye is not, of course, equivalent to God, though when he chugs down that spinach he is pretty much all-powerful, and at least back then he felt to me to be all good, both traditional godlike attributes according to my after-school Catholic catechism lessons.

Then I went back and reread the passage from *Gunslinger*, beginning with these lines . . . :

*The Ego
is costumed as the road manager
of the soul*

. . .
*I got there ahead of myself
I got there ahead of my I*

. . . and opened a discussion to explore what they might mean in a matter of fact way: how for example one's "ego," a modern Western quasi-I-am-equivalent in the ways we are most familiar with it, is a constructed, often fragile, bit of artifice ("costumed") that we project outward and often forward, a force that manages "the soul," a more ethereal I-am-equivalent, in some way, and that it usually does arrive (a sort of crafted persona) before the "I" (which purports to be more authentic) does. Taken in stages, the students could see how the stereotypical "I" we are indoctrinated into by culture, nation, religion and family precedes and could likewise be said to "manage" the more personal "I," which follows its contours, often in rote or servile ways, like an app alias opening all of its functions automatically. We can, of course, renegotiate that power dynamic, but it takes a lot of work.

I returned finally to these lines, which are more enigmatic:

*Yet the sad fact is I is
part of the thing
and can never leave it.*

• • •
Therefore I is not dead.

What “thing,” I wondered more than asked, could Gunslinger be saying his “I” is “part of” in such a way that it “can never leave it?” And why is that a “sad fact?” Slinger’s last comment elides Descartes’ trope with the equally famous “God is dead” trope that Nietzsche injected into the opening moments of modern culture. God may be dead, Slinger seems to be implying, but “I” am not. Which is “sad,” in that the aspect of the “I” part that allied it once with things godly is now just another part of the bodily “thing” that will turn to dust shortly after we die. Maybe. I wasn’t sure back then and still am not.

By the end of the discussion, I think most of the class could see that Slinger’s convolutions of the “I” were not bizarrely unintelligible but were simply verbal depictions of what it was like to be a Western human, especially in the latter half of the 20th century, which made it its business to obsess about identity-related matters endlessly. The wonderful thing about the discussion that day is that it erupted out of nowhere. I had no plan ahead of time to talk about any of this. The student’s question simply provoked me to put together in a skein an array of ways of thinking about what “I am” means to us culturally that I happened to have in my mental inventory right then. That is the joy of teaching.

I go into all of this in such detail here to illustrate the sort of muddle that inevitably arises, especially for a writer, when we try to conceptualize the relationship between what we call the authorial “myself,” the cultural context within which it takes on its “identity,” and the piece of writing being produced. Genre, the established protocols for “managing” all of this for

general consumption—as in how to think about the “writing yourself in-or-out” part—becomes a tacit paradigm for enforcing the “standard model” on both writers and readers whether they like or even know it, which is my point here.

3.

I have spent my career, my whole life, both creative and scholarly, working earnestly to write myself in not out, and trying to persuade others, including my students to do that as well. I'm so happy that I did!

That's a sentence from the note, above, that I decided in the end not to send to my friend, and the next move down my runway. I'll begin with the “my students” part. Every freshman writing course I ever taught (and that's a lot of them!), had some variant of this pronouncement in the course description, asserting the first of the “four main features that I will expect your writing to demonstrate:”

You should be able to take a position of your own in relation to the assigned topic or material, one that you are committed to and are prepared to develop and extend. It will become clearer as the course goes on what I mean by a “position.” But let me say at the outset that it is not a fixed opinion, belief, judgment, or already-established value that you feel compelled simply to declare and defend. It is more like a place you want to stand, with openness toward the ongoing negotiation that any good conversation makes possible, all of your inner resources at the ready, to be used, as necessary, to continue the process of working out in detail, and revising, your original position. You will begin to focus on this part of your intellectual work right from the outset. Intellectual work, in the way I use the term here, is neither

esoteric nor mysterious. Everyone does some, at least some the time, to do one's job well or to live a good life. What distinguishes the university is that it exists specifically and purposively to provide occasions and venues to do intellectual work as its main business. It is our job while we are here and it goes on everywhere, in classrooms, in talks and meetings, and through scholarly research. That is the culture [this course] is designed to promote.

Quite often, students were surprised, even baffled by this, having been indoctrinated for years, via the traditional “research paper,” e.g., to write themselves out of their prose as completely as possible, especially avoiding any use of the pronoun “I.” I explained to them that there was no way they could accomplish the course’s first goal without using that pronoun, but using it to effect required thinking through how one’s “I” stood in relation to what I was calling a writerly “position.” In my initial brief comments, I wanted to make clear that this “I” was not a finalized entity endowed at birth, which leads inevitably to a sort of “spill your guts” or dogmatic sort of writing. Nor was it entirely pre-scripted by a set of conventions the course, a textbook, or I could teach them. It was a site where one’s “myself” was always open to renegotiation, with writing one of the primary tools human consciousness had invented to accomplish this ongoing evolution. I’m sure this was equally baffling to many of them, but I assured them that the writing they did over the coming months would clarify what that meant.

I think you can see the fine line I’m trying to draw here around the most stereotypical concepts of we tend to default to when we think about how our personal “myself” ends up in our prose. The most simplistic version of this in composition studies during my professional interim was called “authentic writing,” all the rage in the late 60s, or “self-based writing,” the name

applied to it dismissively in the late 70s to try to stamp it out. Both are misleading tropes that generated scads of textbooks to promote themselves in college classrooms across America. One valorized autobiography as the most genuine reservoir for authoritative evidence, the “I” a sacrosanct singularity, the other dismissed it as idiosyncratic, the “I” a specious eccentricity.

A position that is founded in one’s own thinking, research and experience, I explained to my classes, is not even remotely the same as regurgitating a fixed opinion inherited from one’s cultural context (family, country, religion, or a batch of loosely patched together quotes from “outside” sources); nor is it fully vested in the genres we use to re-narrate our “experiences” as if they are universally valid. The “I” I wanted them to develop a relationship with, via their writing, was a reservoir for neither an inviolably innate personal “I” endowed with a privilege to “express” itself authoritatively, nor an opaque inner dialect that must be effaced to make it intelligible for an outside “audience,” the two approaches that were competing in the composition textbook marketplace in the 1970s.

The “I” I wanted my students to make and use was, then, never finalized, always in process, a function more than a form, which shifted the proper work of the course away from “composition” as a one-shot deal and toward revision as a chronically recursive process. I had an array of protocols, too elaborate to document here, to teach them how to do this work well. And that’s one function on the lefthand side of an equation that I hope to show will end up equaling “myself” on the right.

As to my scholarly work, I got my first full-time job in an English department whose approaches, vis-à-vis reading and writing, were quite amenable to mine. My first year there was a delight. Then things changed. A new dean hired a new chair to implement a new approach to English studies that was more in

keeping with his social-scientific background. I won't go into all the details involved in this transition, but in scholarly terms this meant shifting away from my more exploratory approach to a very specific version of the then emergent "process" approaches for teaching composition, this one "audience-based" to an extreme, with specific "problem-solving" protocols to guide it. In other words, it was a very aggressive version of the "write yourself out" formula I took issue with above. I was not a fan and made a point of it in my teaching, which got me in some hot water. Then I took the initiative to my research, quite openly assailing both the methods and the players at the table in this argument in an essay called "Rewording the Rhetoric of Composition" (*Pre/Text: an Interdisciplinary Journal of Rhetoric*, Winter 1981, pp. 73-93.)

This piece sought, at least initially, to analyze the most popular textbooks competing at that moment for dominance in the very lucrative market of college writing. Here is how I characterize my approach to that analysis in the first portion of the essay, called "Exploring Texts:"

There are dozens, perhaps hundreds of composition textbooks currently on the market. Yet selecting one for a course is most often a frustrating and unforgiving process of sifting the adequate from the unacceptable, of groping, guessing, and compromising. When confronting this seemingly chaotic array of approaches competing for our attention it is important to remember that a composition textbook is not simply a pedagogical device for enabling students to improve their writing; it is also a definition of what writing is and is for, a kind of argument whose surface rhetoric depends on a broad web of meta-rhetorical assumptions both epistemological and linguistic. . . . Only by exploring texts on this level can we begin to find an orderly procedure for distinguishing various methods and for evaluating their relative merits.

From my vantage point a myriad of possibilities yields to an initial order. For there are three major foci around which most composition textbooks constellate, with each group depending on a different epistemic base for initiating discourse. These bases are (1) in the realm of forms . . . (2) in the inner precincts of the self. . . ; and (3) in the domain of audience. (73)

In other words, in any textbook its compendium of facts and formulas is informed from the outset, and in every way, by a set of ideological imperatives that are most often, and by intention, kept hidden from students. And often from their teachers. Sometimes this is done as a matter of marketing. More often it is because even the author(s) remain oblivious to the historically contingent values and premises that animate their approaches.

This may seem an acceptable, even obvious, critical perspective these days, in the aftermath of the hypercritical culture of postmodernism. But it was decidedly not back in 1979, when I wrote this piece. I actually had no idea how radical and dangerous what I had done was, in part because my “formation”—both academically and by social class—had not pre-indoctrinated me into the sort of “research” that was conventional to the profession. This was my first foray into that arena and I just assumed it would take a “blockbuster” type piece—the kind I enjoyed reading—to warrant publication in such a competitive marketplace. I actually had a very hard time getting it published. It was finally taken up by an innovative new journal willing to risk irritating the “powers that be”—and they were consequential—in the textbook marketplace back then.

I then offer an extended critique—via a range of selected textbooks that I analyze in detail—of the “hidden” ideology supporting each of these approaches, which concludes this way:

In each of these approaches, radically different, contradictory even, as they might at first seem, the same end has been reached: the subordination of language to the service of something that supersedes it, whether that be our own thoughts, our own feelings, or the thoughts and feelings of our readers. These retreats to representational notions of language, for which words are harnessed to report, record or present some other, more important and distinctly separate reality, are not only unacceptable but unnecessary. (81-2)

The middle section of the essay, called “Languaging,” unpacks a quotation from Martin Heidegger’s essay “Building Dwelling Thinking,” the purpose of which is to locate discursive acts not in Platonic-type forms (what were called back then “current-traditional” approaches), nor private selves, (the “authenticity” model), nor in a marketing economy (the “audience-based” models). That section concludes this way:

*Language constitutes worlds; it is intimate to our knowing. . . .
Language is not a tool to express something else with; it is what is expressed. (83-4)*

That’s a long way to have traveled, I suppose, to get at the point I’m making now, almost fifty years later: Which is that there is, in my view, no escaping the way “myself” is complicit with language and how “I am” chooses to use it. The real work is in understanding at a deep and complex level what such a “myself” is both culturally and personally, and then “managing” it wisely to elaborate a “position” for any other “yourself” out there to engage with critically.

I conclude the essay with a section called “Renaming the Imagination” that seeks to recover the concept of “imagination,” which all of the approaches I critique trivialize, as an engine for a new method. My touchstone here is S.T. Coleridge’s famous

definition of the “primary imagination,” which as I said above accords astonishingly creative powers to simple human perception. I contrast this with the term that had largely replaced it in the professional arena of composition studies: invention, all the rage back then, including where I worked, akin to Coleridge’s concept of “fancy.” Coleridge explains it this way:

Fancy, on the contrary, has no other counters to play with, but fixities and definites. The Fancy is indeed no other than a mode of Memory emancipated from the order of time and space; while it is blended with, and modified by that empirical phenomenon of the will, which we express by the word CHOICE. But equally with the ordinary memory the Fancy must receive all its materials ready made from the law of association.

At that moment, in my department, the concept of “vitalism,” common to Romantic-period ideologies, was being bandied about dismissively, without, in my view, any clear sense of what it actually meant or implied. I wanted to use Coleridge’s concept of the “secondary Imagination” to offer an alternative way for thinking about what he calls “re-creation” that was far less mechanical than the one these new approaches proffered: Here is what he says about that:

The secondary [Imagination] I consider as an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the kind of its agency, and differing only in degree, and in the mode of its operation. It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and unify. It is essentially vital [italics mine], even as all objects (as objects) are essentially fixed and dead.

<https://www.sjsu.edu/faculty/harris/StudentProjects/Laset/Biographia.htm>

All the other major Romantics in both England (especially Wordsworth and Shelley) and America (especially Emerson and Whitman) have lots to say about what “vitality” means both for human perception and in linguistic composition. I didn’t write about all of that in this early piece, but at least I had read the sources, so had an idea of why this was an important concept that should be understood before it was dismissed.

As a sidenote: One part of this essay was a very aggressive and frontal assault on what I considered to be the impoverished “theory of composition” that was being imposed on our department from the outside-in by social scientists who weren’t and would never be teachers of writing, a disciplinary matrix that misunderstood the “history of composition” as it was rendered in all of these competing textbooks as well as a whole host of concepts that those of us in English studies were much better positioned to understand in their complexity. About a year after it was published (the academic world grinds along at such a glacial pace) I was terminated, understandably. So right from the outset, I had some skin in this game and some of it got seriously abraded. Fortunately, the very publications, this one and a few others on poetics, that got me fired from my first job got me hired at my second job, where I stayed for the next 36 years.

4.

*Yet the sad fact is I is
part of the thing
and can never leave it.*

I want to swing back around to this sentence from *Gunslinger* to talk about a problematic concerning the “myself” that is different from the one I dissected in my classes or in my research all those years ago. I’m especially interested in “the thing” that the “I” is “part of,” and why, for Slinger, that is a “sad fact.” In some ways, I would argue (based on my own myself’s experience) that the late-60s, the scene for Dorn’s composition, was the moment in Western history where Descartes’ mind/body dualism (the conventional way for talking about the schism ensconced in his “method”) essentially had a nervous breakdown, the *sum* part hoping to find a way to escape from the *cogito* part once and for all, but realizing the “sad fact” that “it” can never leave “I am,” not at least without tearing down the whole shebang of cultural infrastructure that keeps them parceled out in this way.

The sort of identity fission Slinger documents in this passage was particularly acute in the late-1960s and early 70s when Dorn was writing *Gunslinger*. A deep disaffection with the conventional identities one inherits from the extant cultural context is commonplace during periods of profound social upheaval, which is why so many parents, comfortable with their “I”s and the myths that kept them cossetted, could not fathom, or often tolerate, their children’s rebelliousness. You can see the same dynamic among the post WWI Modernists, especially in England and France, including the American expats who congregated there. And among Romantics at the end of the 18th century in England and France again, the sites of the greatest turmoil. In each of these historical contexts this led to a proliferation of alternative religious systems, some self-invented, as in Blake’s case, some culturally alien, as in Eliot’s case, at least early on. For my generation, it was an assortment of religions and philosophies based mostly (and quite loosely) on Eastern systems, where the characteristic Western divide between the human and godly “I am”s is not so pronounced.

Some of these became permanent, as in the case of Gary Snyder's Buddhism. Some became weakly and temporarily influential, as in the case of an *On the Road*-type Hinduism: I remember, for example, reading the *Bhagavat Gita* and *Upanishads*, along with many of my classmates in college, not in any courses but on our own. But most of them were simply cults. There were the relatively innocuous brands, like the Moonies, (followers of Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church), many of whom sat in my classes or knocked on my door when I started to teach in the early 70s; or the Hare Krishnas, advocates of a version of Hinduism highlighting the all-powerful deity Krishna, so visible on the streets in their loose-fitting clothes and long robes, and at airports, chanting and selling flowers. It might seem hard to believe now, but these mostly young people were so ubiquitous 50 years ago that they were simply part of the daily landscape of life. The fact that they are now anachronisms suggests their ultimate inefficacy at resolving the "sadness" at the root of Western dualisms.

And then there were the noxious brands, which had self-appointed leaders as stand-ins for God, like the Branch Davidians, led by David Koresh, or the People's Temple, founded by Jim Jones, or the more localized Manson family, all of which ultimately led to death and destruction. If you're familiar with how all of this played out, I think you can calculate for yourself some of the problems that can arise when humans seek some solace from their "sadness" in human god-alternatives.

At the root of this disaffection was a sense that Christianity especially, the overwhelmingly dominant original religion of these "converts," had lost its capacity to speak to/for the human spirit at that historical moment, one in which these crises of faith reflected the many crises being played out in the public square. There was one brief moment very early in the history of Christianity where things could have taken a different

turn, maybe averting all of this chaos: the 4th and 5th centuries as the Catholic Church consolidated its identity and power just as the Roman Empire was “falling.” This transition from a complex array of Christian congregations, each with its own preferred holy texts, into a singular orthodoxy with only one sacrosanct text, the Bible, was relatively sudden and violent.

I want to examine two facets of this “war” over the human/God binary during that interim as Christianity took its modern form. I’ll focus first on a relatively personal battle that played out between two Christian heavyweights: Pelagius and Augustine, the former imbued with a Celtic vision of godliness universally distributed not only among all peoples, but in every element of the natural world; the latter promoting a profound separation between humans and God, one that could only be reconciled by a combination of Jesus’ crucifixion and the exclusively Catholic sacrament of baptism. A couple of sections down here, I’ll then look at the simultaneous battles to eradicate, via the heresy route, all the alternative ways for thinking about this relationship, a process that involved not just banning but burning any scriptures countering the preferred orthodoxy of the emergent “universal” Catholic Church. The only reason we know anything specific about most of these texts, now called the “lost” gospels, is that some were buried back then, for long-term safekeeping, and unearthed by accident in the 20th century.

At the foundation of the argument between Augustine and Pelagius is a very simple question pertaining to the consequences of Adam’s Original Sin: Are humans born “with God” (i.e., foundationally good, therefore innocent, lights-on, *a la* Pelagius) or “against God” (i.e., inclined to evil, lights-out, therefore guilty, *a la* Augustine)? Augustine believed that Adam’s primal violation of God’s command fully alienated his progeny, humankind, from God’s spirit and timeless goodness. This sin was inherited at conception, making sex by definition

profane. As he says, we are by birthright “*massi peccati*,” a mess of sin. The only possible path back from this radical individuation and into a quasi-communal presence with God was, first of all, Jesus’ advent and crucifixion and, second of all, baptism into the “one true religion,” Roman Catholicism. That leaves out a lot of people, obviously, like all the people who came before Jesus and all the people who were not both Catholic and baptized. He went so far as to exclude even unbaptized Catholic infants from the possibility of heaven. It took almost another full millennium for the Church to come to terms with this infamy via the invention of Limbo, a semi-heaven where such infants would spend eternity, God out of their sight.

Augustine lays all of this out in *On Nature and Grace*, which was the playbook for his case against Pelagius, a Celtic monk with a growing congregation of followers in and outside of Rome at that time. And later on Augustine doubles down on this in his magnum opus *The City of God*, which is always at odds with the City of Man, by definition corrupt, a “*massi peccati*” on steroids if you will. Christianity, he insists, did not precipitate the fall of Rome, a critique he was trying to staunch with this latter book. The real “fall” happened all the way back with Adam, and the corruption his sin built into the human genome was what brought down Rome as well, as it brings down all human “empires,” whether cultural or individual. The Church was in fact, he argues, not the villain but the hero in the inevitable decline and fall of the Roman Empire.

Pelagius on the other hand, was, as I said, Celtic, a culture rooted in stereotypical Indigenous values—vis-à-vis, in this case, the relationship of the individual to the Godhead and to its community of others. And one that had been in conflict—I mean bigtime conflict, massacres, genocide, sackings of cities etc.—with Rome, back and forth, for many centuries. For Pelagius, Adam’s slip-up, while consequential, was not

universally and perpetually damning, leaving considerable room for genuine “free will” in affairs of the human spirit and assigning considerable weight to good works, intentionally performed, as a way to rectify one’s relationship with God. We are in effect foundationally good from the moment of our conception, which makes sex sacred rather than profane, only losing our way because of cultural or individual weaknesses. Augustine relies almost entirely on Paul’s letters to elaborate his position, focusing on Paul’s preference for faith over good works. Pelagius turns almost exclusively to Jesus’ words to support his, focusing on his calls to action. In short, Pelagius believes we are born “with God” Augustine believes “against.”

In “Pelagius, Augustine and the Death of Nature,” from my book *waking up: reading wisdom texts*, I work all of this out in much more detail, if you’re interested in this crisis. As part of that analysis I put together a list of all the binaries I could think of that derive inevitably from those two foundational positions and organized them in related pairs, with Pelagius’ preferences on the left sides of the backslashes, Augustine’s on the right. Just a cursory glance over the list will give you a pretty good idea of how drastically different they were in their spiritual visions:

1. *good/evil; unity/duality*
2. *light/dark; life/death*
3. *matriarchy/patriarchy; feminine/masculine*
4. *community/authority; equity/hierarchy*
5. *tolerance/orthodoxy; freedom/control*
6. *love/fear; truth/power*

The only set of binary pairs I’ll comment on specifically here are the first two, because they speak most clearly to the problem of the “myself” and its relation to “others,” whether

heavenly or worldly. Here are the pertinent passages from my essay:

Pelagius believes that we are of God and with God, end of story: Humankind is born inherently good, and that is universally true, Christian or not. Every human being is of infinite value as an instantiation of the image of God. One of the tropes Pelagius uses is the face of a child, innocent and beautiful, unsullied by any sin, including the stigmatic original one. So, simply, there are no “others” to fear or hate; we are all one. Any sort of prejudice, including slavery of course, is an abomination, an assault on the godliness intrinsic to our being. As he says:

First, then, you ought to measure the good of human nature by reference to its Creator. . . . If it is he who has made the world good, exceeding good, how much more excellent do you suppose that he has made humanity . . . fashioned in his image and likeness. . . . Learn to appreciate the dignity of human nature. (Rees, 29).

...
Likewise, nature, everything in it, from the cosmos itself down to the tiniest constituent part, is similarly sacred in his view, a value that was foundational to the Druidic culture that Christianity had been quite amicably merging with over several centuries, absent Roman domination, in the Celtic portions of the British Isles. As he says:

There is no creature on earth in whom God is absent God’s spirit is present in plants as well. The presence of God’s spirit in all living things is what makes them beautiful; and if we look with God’s eyes, nothing on the earth is ugly. . . . [W]hen Jesus commands us to love our neighbors, he does not only mean our human neighbors, he means all the animals and birds, insects and plants, amongst whom we live. (Van de Weyer, 71-72)

. . .

We are a part of that nature, not its overseers; it is all of a piece, unitary, wholly one, with us in it not above it. The earth is to be savored, cared for, respected, in order to promote life—all of it, flora, fauna, soil, stars, all of it—not to be plundered for wealth or domination. For Augustine and his sponsors, bent on colonization and depredation, no way any of this can stand.
(*waking up*, 123-126)

Augustine pressed his case against Pelagius repeatedly over many years in a variety of Papal inquiries, finally succeeding in getting Pelagius' position declared heretical and having him excommunicated and exiled. The point I want to make about all of this is that a simple shift in our founding principles can radically reorient the conception of the "myself" at the center of our spiritual enterprise. Pelagius was seeking to renegotiate in fundamental ways the relationship between individual I-ams and God's I-am-who-I-am, premising it on love rather than fear. Likewise with the relationship between the personal I am and its cosmic community of "others." In other words, these are not esoteric matters available only to an intellectual and spiritual elite. In most Indigenous cultures almost everyone knows all of this instinctively from birth and lives simply as if it were true.

I would argue (see below), as Pelagius does, that this was Jesus' project as well. The main opponents for movements of this sort tend to be ardent patriarchal authoritarians who believe in top-down, pyramidal, organizational hierarchies, which had been fundamental pillars of Western culture for at least a millennium before these two duke it out in Rome 1500 hundred years ago, tipping the scales dramatically in favor of Augustine's position. As all of this pertains to my argument here: There is a way of thinking about one's myself that is not isolationist, dogmatic or arrogant, one premised on both love

and community, including the whole of nature “we are a part of” (all those qualities on the right sides of backslashes above), which is what, in the end (see further below) my “story” was really about, not some egocentric me-myselfness I need to write my way out of.

5.

For reasons I can't quite fathom, I've been binge watching a lot of the old Western TV series I grew up with in the 1950s. Currently I'm in the midst of “Tombstone Territory, the town too tough to die.” In all of them the thigh-slung six-gun is both the law and the anti-law. There are heroes and villains with very little in between: the forces of good and the protectors of the weak—the Lone Ranger, Hopalong Cassidy, Bat Masterson, Wyatt Earp, and in the case of Tombstone, Clay Hollinger—who sooner or later always win out over the forces of evil—the murderous outlaws/renegades or the amoral wealth mongers. The right/wrong dyad is always clearly marked. And right always wins. It was to some extent my nostalgia for that moral paradigm that drew me out west after I retired. I understood, of course, that this was a fantasy. It just happened to be one I've always found appealing.

And watching all these old shows made me at least consider if not conclude that my own black/white moral paradigm, which I always thought was forged by the extreme Catholicism I grew up with, may in fact have been formed, or at least amplified, by these Western morality tales. My internal moral compass in this regard was fixed permanently in that state by my fervid activism in the late 60s, my coming of age moment. I'm so happy now that it was. The ethical/cultural/intellectual world I encountered later, during the latter half of the 20th century, was as I experienced it all shades of gray, wrong and right no longer useful categories. And I didn't like it.

The ethical world my inner self lived in on the other hand was as black and white as these Westerns, where there were two types of “rugged” individualism, one selfish, living in the service of power/fame/money (the villains); the other selfless, in the service of others (the heroes.) I think that explains a lot about what I was able to accomplish and how out of synch with the times I always felt.

I’m going to use this framework to transition to what might seem like a remote, unrelated expression of the same cultural tendency: Abraham Maslow’s famous concept of the “hierarchy of needs,” a trope he first proposed in the 1940s and then tinkered with for the rest of his life, one that was ubiquitous in the popular discourse of the 1960s and 70s. Maslow’s vision of human growth is generally depicted in pyramidal form (though he never himself used that format), the more basic elements at the base ascending to self-actualization at the apex. He believed that the vast majority of people never reach that top level and those who do only reside there occasionally or rarely. In between the two were anywhere from three to five intermediate stages (depending on the stage of Maslow’s career), with needs like esteem, belonging and love, and safety early on and with aesthetic and cognitive needs added later.

All of this makes perfect sense in the context of Western systems, which are inherently hierarchical in their organizational structures and reserve the highest privileges for a very small elite. I found this paradigm to be the relatively crude and not very interesting even back in the 70s when it was at its peak of currency. But, aside from my constitutional distrust and contempt for hierarchical organizational structure, I never stopped to figure out why. A few days ago my daughter Bridget sent me an article that was a revelation to me and helped to explain my general disappointment with his theory. The article argued (on the basis of mostly circumstantial evidence) that

Maslow actually borrowed his concept of self-actualization from the Siksika (Blackfoot) Native culture, his having spent time at Siksika, the Blackfoot Reserve, in the late 1930s, about five years before he first published his findings.

Here's a paragraph from that article that gets to the point I want to make about all of this:

According to Blood and Heavy Head's lectures (2007), 30-year-old Maslow arrived at Siksika along with Lucien Hanks and Jane Richardson Hanks. He intended to test the universality of his theory that social hierarchies are maintained by dominance of some people over others. However, he did not see the quest for dominance in Blackfoot society. Instead, he discovered astounding levels of cooperation, minimal inequality, restorative justice, full bellies, and high levels of life satisfaction. He estimated that "80–90% of the Blackfoot tribe had a quality of self-esteem that was only found in 5–10% of his own population" (video 7 out of 15, minutes 13:45–14:15). As Ryan Heavy Head shared with me on the phone, "Maslow saw a place where what he would later call self-actualization was the norm." This observation, Heavy Head continued, "totally changed his trajectory."

<https://www.resilience.org/stories/2021-06-18/the-blackfoot-wisdom-that-inspired-maslows-hierarchy/>

Well, "changed his trajectory" might be a stretch. Instead of designing a hierarchy with a universal, taken-for-granted-at-birth concept of self-actualization at the base, which is the Siksika model, he put it at the top, as a rarely achieved state of transcendence. He came to the Siksika Reserve to test "the universality of his theory that social hierarchies are maintained by dominance of some people over others," found it utterly inapplicable in this alternative cultural setting, and stuck with it anyway. But why? Well, the only reason I can imagine is that he was both produced by and writing for a culture in which in-

built self-actualization is as unimaginable as foundational goodness was for Augustine. Whether he made his design choice blindly, pragmatically or duplicitously is impossible to know for sure. But make it he did. In other words, he had a moment where he had to listen either to his inner Pelagius or to his inner Augustine, and the latter won.

I don't want to suggest that Maslow was in a position to change our cultural trajectory in any way analogous to Pelagius. The 1950s was not 400 CE. There was no place at that moment for the sort of fundamental change the Siksika model of a non-hierarchy of needs represented. Had Maslow gone with it, he most likely would never have gotten his work published; it would have appeared nonsensical. Either he understood that, and chose to endorse the status quo for his own professional reasons. Or he was so well indoctrinated into that status quo that he couldn't find a way out of it even when presented with overwhelming evidence of its toxicity.

The fact that he encountered this cultural model in a Native community is what connects it here to all those western gunslinger shows I've been watching. In every one, the ongoing battle between settlers, supported by the US army, and Indian tribes serves as a chronic backdrop in their morality tales. Indians are not always portrayed demonically. Sometimes they are secondary heroes. But the "rights" of Westerners (in the cultural sense) to displace them, most often with violence, is an unquestioned premise, the wolf of Manifest Destiny disguised in the sheep's clothing of all those western (in the frontier sense) rugged individuals.

6.

As I promised above, I want to return again to the 4th- 5th century consolidation of the Catholic Church around a singular and commonly agreed upon set of scriptures, a process that

involved a number of “ecumenical councils” during that interim, beginning with the Council of Nicaea in 325 CE. The generally rendered story about this process tends to focus on its positive outcomes: a consensus about the divinity of Jesus and the creation of the standard Bible. It took a couple of centuries for what we now take for granted as a Christian orthodoxy, and the approved version of the Bible, to fully take hold, a process of “organization” that was quite brutal at times. Scholars estimate that as much as 85% of early Christian writing was “lost” by this means, a benign way to describe what was an intentional, Florida-style book-banning process on steroids designed to homogenize the array of sometimes-competing alternatives into a single coherent canon. The official instrument for this purge was the concept of heresy, which was pretty much an invention of the early church:

The Greek word hairesis (from which heresy is derived) was originally a neutral term that signified merely the holding of a particular set of philosophical opinions. Once appropriated by Christianity however, the term heresy began to convey a note of disapproval.

(<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Pelagius-Christian-theologian>)

“Disapproval” is a pretty mild term to describe the systematic annihilation of all these sacred texts, and the exiling and excommunicating of those who defended them. What we now call Gnosticism was largely constructed by the Roman church as a means of vilifying that particular brand of early texts, the ones I’ll be writing about here. The Greek root of that word, gnosis, is a relatively innocuous word meaning knowledge that is self-generated. Why “them was fightin’ words” for the early church fathers has more to do with The City of Man and how its values and imperatives were being

superimposed over the Church than with the City of God, despite Augustine's protestations.

The main argument was between those who favored an equitable religious community in which each individual has considerable authority not only to choose their preferred scriptures but to interpret them on their own terms; and those who favored a strictly hierarchical structure with the laity at the bottom in a servile relationship with the priestly elite who controlled the hermeneutic and sermonic processes. It doesn't take a savant to discern the power imbalance in this equation and to predict the losers. In other words, it is a mirror image of the Pelagius/Augustine contest that was playing out simultaneously, one side imbued with the values typical of Indigenous (and many Eastern) cultures, the other rabidly Western, i.e., Roman.

The only reason we know most of what we do know about many of the "lost" gospels is the accidental discovery, by farmers plowing their fields in Nag Hammadi in 1945, of a trove of documents buried for safekeeping most likely in the 4th century. I'll focus on the most famous (and my favorite) of these—the lost Gospel of Thomas—to demonstrate how different both the ideology of Gnosticism and the figure of Jesus himself are from the now taken-for-granted orthodoxy of the Church.

In that gospel (and in the Gnostic gospels generally) Jesus specifies the four main qualities of consciousness necessary to achieve the sort of enlightenment he clearly believes is available to all, should they be so inclined: childlikeness, a permeable interface between the outside and inside, gender neutrality, and non-binary habits of mind. Here's a passage where Jesus talks about all of these at once:

*"Jesus saw infants being suckled. He said to his disciples,
"These infants being suckled are like those who enter the*

kingdom.”

They said to him, “Shall we then, as children, enter the kingdom?”

Jesus said to them, “When you make the two one, and when you make the inside like the outside and the outside like the inside, and the above like the below, and when you make the male and the female one and the same, so that the male not be male nor the female; and when you fashion eyes in the place of an eye, and a hand in place of a hand, and a foot in place of a foot, and a likeness in place of a likeness; then will you enter the kingdom.” (*waking up*, 162: all quotes from Thomas O. Lambdin’s translation of the Gospel of Thomas, The Gnostic Society Library: <http://www.gnosis.org/naghamm/nhl.html>)

Let me take these features one at a time, quoting liberally from a longer treatment of this text called “When You Make the Two One” in my book *waking up: reading wisdom texts*. I’ll start my commentary where the aphorism starts, with the figure of the child, which is ubiquitous in this gospel, as in this passage:

“Jesus said, “The man old in days will not hesitate to ask a small child seven days old about the place of life, and he will live. For many who are first will become last, and they will become one and the same.”

This one concerns the need to return to the ultimate state of innocence, childlikeness, where language is no longer a factor in perception and learning, an image akin to the one Pelagius uses over and over, the child’s face, to represent the radiant state of sinlessness we are born into. Here “a small child seven days old” becomes a font of wisdom for “[t]he man old in days,” the stage of life I’m at now, when one begins to realize something of

consequence about both wisdom and innocence: that it is a matter of what kind of eyes one looks at the world through that determines what one sees, an alternate sensory version of the “ears to hear” trope. A child so new to the world clearly “knows” nothing about it and has no way to share its vision. Yet its eyes see and gather everything equitably, which is what the old man here aspires to do as well. It is at these two extremes—very old and very young—that, Jesus says, first and last (in this case, newborn and elderly) become simultaneous.

...

These child/light motifs may be one of the reasons this gospel was deemed disposably heretical, prefiguring as they do Pelagius’ vision. I’ve indicated along the way how the church, from its earliest moments under Paul’s stewardship, seemed to prefer an orthodoxy that privileged darkness, death and sin over light, life and innocence. Likewise, it preferred autocracy over democracy, hierarchy over community, and patriarchy over equity in its institutional structure. It took several more centuries for this agenda to be fully implemented as the foundational identity of Christianity, a process that required obsessive attention to the seemingly endless stream of heresies that kept descending on the church, including Gnosticism. This innocent “children of the light” stuff, open to all at any moment simply by waking up, and the implication that there were hidden in Jesus’s teachings secrets too deep to share universally and authoritatively from the pulpit were clear threats to that agenda. (waking up, 164-168)

The merger and interpenetration of the “inside and the outside,” “the above and the below,” that Jesus models adds an additional layer of mystery to this way of thinking about how what he calls “the kingdom” might apply to this world rather than the next. There are any number of poetic texts scattered across history that advocate for or enact mergers of

this sort. They were particularly common during the Romantic period in both England (William Blake's *Songs* and his later more esoteric long poems, e.g.) and America (Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself" from his *Leaves of Grass* an especially good example.) As I go on to say in "When You Make the Two One," Whitman's poem opens with this promise:

*I celebrate myself, and sing myself,
And what I assume you shall assume,
For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.*

This atom for atom merger resembles what I'm talking about, not the loss of identity but finding it, via the other with whom my "I am" is in communion. Whitman doesn't preach here (though he does elsewhere), he leads dialogically, so that the "you" of the poem in his equation, which is me as I read, can merge with his "I," whereby I become more myself (and I would argue "he" becomes more himself) a seeming contradiction only if you begin with strictly binary identity categories.

...

"Jesus' injunction "to make the male and the female one and the same" adds an antipatriarchal dimension to his already antihierarchical system, both anathema to the Church fathers and to deeply rooted Western cultural traditions. How the Christian culture became, almost universally, so stringently patriarchal, even misogynist, is understandable, if unforgivable, given the Roman culture into which it was gradually assimilated. This tendency is not, though, founded on the words or habits of Jesus, who clearly liked women, attracted them as disciples, and treated them as equals to the men in his entourage, even when they didn't. Mary Magdalene is the best example of this. I won't go into the complex

history of this remarkable woman in relation both to her discipleship and to her gradual transformation over time from Jesus' highly favored follower and friend, perhaps even partner, to a [Jesus-redeemed prostitute.] Here is a good example to illustrate the gender-tension among Jesus' disciples:

Mary said to Jesus, "Whom are your disciples like?" He said, "They are like children who have settled in a field which is not theirs. When the owners of the field come, they will say, 'Let us have back our field.' They (will) undress in their presence in order to let them have back their field and to give it back to them. Therefore I say, if the owner of a house knows that the thief is coming, he will begin his vigil before he comes and will not let him dig through into his house of his domain to carry away his goods. You, then, be on your guard against the world. Arm yourselves with great strength lest the robbers find a way to come to you, for the difficulty which you expect will (surely) materialize. Let there be among you a man of understanding. When the grain ripened, he came quickly with his sickle in his hand and reaped it. Whoever has ears to hear, let him hear."

Mary is clearly a prominent enough disciple to ask Jesus a direct question (a feminine role that Paul specifically precludes in Corinthians 1). And Jesus' answer, delivered in the presence of his male apostles, is a stunning rebuke of their apparent gender privilege. Here is one of the few instances in Jesus' teachings where childlikeness is a bad thing. These men, he implies, will give up the field meekly and completely when the owners demand it back. Jesus' admonition to them is to prepare to defend the "house," one's inner kingdom of God, "against the world," which they certainly have to learn how to do in the aftermath of his execution. The "man of understanding" will reap the grain expeditiously, before it withers or

can be stolen. All of this is punctuated by the “ears to hear” trope that Jesus often repeats when he’s trying to get his disciples to wake up. The reference to “man” seems to me to suggest that Mary may be the only one among those gathered exempt from his critique.

. . .

But by far the most radical of Jesus’ mandates is this one: “make the two one,” which is almost unthinkable in Western systems of thought, so deeply ensconced in polar-binary habits of mind. Very little of this makes it into the Biblical canon down the line, for the same reasons, I believe, that Augustine worked so strenuously to sideline Pelagius: Patriarchy and misogyny simply cannot survive outside of binaries. Pelagius is as close as I’ve been able to find so far to a prominent contestant in the argument who believes that two can become one. And you know now what fate he met for that heresy.

Here are a few additional passages where Jesus further explores this two-into-one enigma:

Jesus said, “This heaven will pass away, and the one above it will pass away. The dead are not alive, and the living will not die. In the days when you consumed what is dead, you made it what is alive. When you come to dwell in the light, what will you do? On the day when you were one you became two. But when you become two, what will you do?”

. . .

Jesus said, “If two make peace with each other in this one house, they will say to the mountain, ‘Move Away,’ and it will move away.”

In the first example, oneness becoming twoness creates confusion—for example the illusion that life and death exist in a strict binary relationship—making it impossible to “dwell in the light,” where all that tension is resolved. In the latter example Jesus uses reconciliation between the two (rather than faith as in Matthew 7:20) as the means for moving mountains with a simple command, a dramatic shift in the conception of where spiritual power is founded.

...

Finally, I return to the passage I started with, which Jesus concludes this way:

“and when you fashion eyes in the place of an eye, and a hand in place of a hand, and a foot in place of a foot, and a likeness in place of a likeness; then will you enter the kingdom.”

This one seems especially elusive to me. I personally take Jesus to mean (based on what I’ve arrived at via the other themes so far) that one needs to rebuild oneself from the ground up, from the inside out and the outside in, to create an authentic likeness in place of the generic “likeness” that culture and society indoctrinate us into. This requires every step I’ve detailed thus far: becoming childlike, reconciling the inside with the outside, transcending gender, and resolving binaries into singularities, twos into ones. “[T]hen will you enter the kingdom,” which is the point of it all, for me at least, where I want to be as often and for as long as humanly possible. (waking up, 169-180)

All of this may seem well askance from my argument here, but its connection is a simple one: There is a way of thinking about one’s myself that does in fact evade the most toxic

elements that Western culture endows it with. Achieving it requires all four of the elements that Jesus both explains and models in the Gospel of Thomas: becoming childlike, merging inside with outside, overriding gender categories, and learning how to think outside of hegemonic binaries. From that vantage point, everything and everyone “out there” is just as godly as I am “in here.” In fact, that boundary collapses, and “myself” has no meaning outside the communities, social and natural, that my I am belongs to. Getting there seems like such a daunting challenge, but only because Western culture has erected nearly insuperable barriers to block the path. Some Eastern and, especially, Indigenous cultures take all of this for granted from birth. For them, it is not a matter for lifelong study or discipline, available only to the few. It is, literally, child’s play, available to anyone, men and women alike, at any moment simply by stepping an inch outside our inside in such a way that the inside becomes outside and “the two (including gender) become one.” That is what my “story” is about and why “myself” is the proper medium for sharing it.

7.

Which takes me at last (see, I told you I’d get here) back to my story that is not a story. I decided while writing all of this to use this essay as a sort of extended prologue for the story itself, which I include below. So my explanation of its specific “myselfness” will be relatively brief. As I said, the story is based on a very vivid dream. When I woke from it, I felt an imperative to write it up, a process I began immediately by taking notes on the names, places, and events that would serve as its “plot.” Then, in the middle of the night, I started typing.

I had no idea where it was headed when I started writing it. I just followed its lead where it took me. It ended up as an

extended personal meditation (or soliloquy, if you prefer) on three big things that have animated my thinking, lately and over the course of my life. The first pertains to matters of organizational leadership that I gave some thought to during my career, which included a lot of administrative roles, and had been talking about in great detail with my daughter, who serves in a leadership role and is even more astute and well-read in this area than I am. The claim the story makes about the way leadership style inf(lects every aspect of an organizational system, down to the very atomic level of the material products it makes, may sound preposterous, but there are elements of quantum mechanics that make this set of connections plausible, at least to me.

And that's the second big thing animating my thinking lately: the highly technical discourses of contemporary quantum mechanics and astrophysics, which I had been binge-reading-documentary-viewing about for many months in advance of writing the story, all building on a lifelong interest in physics generally. The knowledge base in these arenas is expanding at an exponential pace these days, opening up more and bigger and more exciting questions than the ones scientists are now finding provisional answers for. I can no longer do the high-level math required to demonstrate the veracity of these claims. But I know enough about all of that to have an instinct for what seems plausible to me and what does not. In any case, I just enjoy thinking about the cosmic system we are whirling around in, most often all too blithely, ignoring what it is and how it works.

The third big thing was a personal "philosophy of life" I've been working out in some detail for myself ever since my wife died ten years ago. One aspect of this involves a tacit critique of capitalist approaches not just to economic matters but also to the proper relationship among my personal identity, the larger human community, the natural world, and the godhead. I

think you can tell from the previous sections what my predilections are in relation to the “myself” I feel is at stake in this elegant equation.

All three of these things raise foundational questions about what a legitimate human vocation should be at this crucial juncture in history. Western systems in particular are coming apart at the seams, politically, socially and environmentally, under the burdens what I call “the four horsemen of the apocalypse” to which they have become addicted, the ones bell hooks names in this passage from *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity and Love* (1994):

Often in my lectures when I use the phrase “imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy” to describe our nation’s political system, audiences laugh. No one has ever explained why accurately naming this system is funny. The laughter is itself a weapon of patriarchal terrorism. It functions as a disclaimer, discounting the significance of what is being named. It suggests that the words themselves are problematic and not the system they describe. (29)

I could have attempted to do this in the essay form I’m using here. But, as Socrates says when he’s trying to explain the “soul” to Phaedrus:

What manner of thing it is would be a long tale to tell, and most assuredly a god alone could tell it, but what it resembles, that a man might tell in briefer compass. Let this therefore be our manner of discourse. (trans. R. Hackforth, lls. 246b)

Socrates then goes on to tell a long story-that-is-not-a-story using a winged chariot riding through the heavens as a metaphor for the soul and its transmigratory journeys. In *Writing/Teaching: Essays Toward a Rhetoric of Pedagogy* I use this to make a case for the superior efficacy of figurative discourse—

vis-à-vis strictly representation discourse—for rendering vexatious truths of this sort. I am not a god, of course, so turning to fiction as a figurative medium for the matters I felt a pressing need to write about seemed to me to be a wise and, following Socrates’ imperative, prudent decision. And don’t forget, this story was precipitated by a dream. Dreams are not rendered as philosophical disquisitions but as a loosely configured series of images with at best a quasi-narrative line holding them together.

For me, then, this piece served as a highly efficient vehicle—one told “in briefer compass”—to ensconce an array of values that I believe in sincerely. You may or may not like it. But whenever, going forward, I become vague or confused about those things, I will reread it to remind myself just how simple it is to live a life on behalf of the good in a cultural context—the array of systems deeply vested in dysfunctional values we have to inhabit whether we like it or not, which is what Western “history” amounts to—that imposes penalties, some routine, almost invisible, some quite severe, on everyone, including those who call them into question. The most likely outcome for such a cultural “story” is, in fact, exactly the sort of catastrophic collapse that my dream depicted for me to begin with.

So in lieu of an elaborate re-telling in the language of the gods, I simply offer the story itself that I ended up “writing myself into.” A final caveat, repeated: If after a page or two you find it aggravatingly soliloquistic, just stop. It will not get better. Read some Tolstoy instead.

An Afterthought:

A writer is dear and necessary for us only in the measure of which he reveals to us the inner workings of his very soul.

Leo Tolstoy

Given where and when Tolstoy was writing, the analogy between “soul” and “yourself” is not likely an exact one. So it’s possible that writing the latter out might somehow, for him, “reveal” the former, though I doubt it. In any case, given all I’ve said about alternative ways for organizing our I ams it is hard for me to imagine a formula in which these two entities are utterly contrary to one another. I won’t go so far as to say that my story “reveals . . . the inner workings of [my] very soul.” But when I was writing it, that’s what it felt like.

The Hyperion Chronicles

Post #1, June 2201: “The Dreamtime”

My name is Paul. I was born in 2179, ten years before the implosion of the globe-encircling particle accelerator called Hyperion that sterilized huge portions of the planet. My mother, among the human survivors, was one of the engineers who helped to design that instrument. She and a few of her colleagues had survived the blast because they were not on-site when it occurred, their part in the project—planning primarily—having long been completed. During the dark years in the immediate aftermath, before she passed when I was 15, she spent many evenings teaching me why it was built and how it worked. The mechanism, she said, was designed to accelerate dark matter particles toward collisions at speeds equivalent to those that existed in the first seconds after the Big Bang. Since dark matter is relatively massive and has no charge, electromagnetic forces were ineffectual toward that end. Her working group was charged with developing a way to harness dark energy instead to recreate that chaos of mutual annihilation, in a contained space of this sort, where its aftereffects, the spray of particles it produced, could be measured.

While the physics of dark matter was relatively well-established—it had been detected in its “natural” form and measured *vis-à-vis* other particles—it had never been “smashed” into its component parts; it was not even clear if there were such parts. This was the most immediate practical purpose of Hyperion. But there were other purposes as well. For example, a sort of mythology had developed—akin to the one around the Higgs boson “God particle” in the 20th century—that believed the Hyperion would not just simulate a very small scale Big Bang, but could provide the first information ever about what precipitates such events; that is, it would reverse the known timeline of the universe into negative

space and perhaps reveal something about the God-force that creates Big Bangs. The physics of dark energy was much sketchier. While its general nature and function on the intergalactic scale were fairly well-understood, how, or even if, it operated on smaller scales, was more speculative. A predictive mathematical model was in place. But none of it had been experimentally verified. Hyperion was, in fact, created, in part, to provide that verification.

My mother specialized in studying relationships between consciousness and materiality, a very specific sort of mind/matter discipline that emerged at the intersection between neuroscience and quantum mechanics starting in the 21st century and evolved in the meantime into a well-established field of scientific study. She and her colleagues had already, they believed, demonstrated that such a relationship was built into our universe at the quantum level by the Big Bang, expressed thereafter in countless ways, including via interactions between dark matter and dark energy (which constitute 95% of the matter/energy inventory of the cosmos), and could therefore be analyzed and represented mathematically, via a new branch of subjective probability math they had developed. The ultimate hope that motivated her “school” was that unraveling the mechanics of this “dark” relationship would not only more fully explain what those two entities were and how they worked (or didn’t) in tandem, but would also help to unravel the mystery of time’s organizational relationship with space, including why it moved in only one direction in this universe, while the pertinent mathematics seemed to allow for bi-directionality, which was at that time a preeminent concern among scientists.

I was too young initially to master the complex mathematics and philosophical subtlety associated with her work; and since all education came to a sudden halt after the catastrophe, I was left to my own devices to acquire those skills,

which I did over the first 5 years after her death, using the extensive library she left behind. I have now spent an additional 2 years trying to piece together a written record of what happened preceding the event, and some of what has happened in its aftermath, in the absence of documentary evidence, which was destroyed by the blast.

It all started with a dream I had on the eve of my 20th birthday, which “spoke” in some way that my brain, in the dream state, could translate into my everyday vernacular, the terms I enclose in quotation marks below. Thereafter, over period of about a year, I had additional occasional dreams that elaborated this lexicon into a coherent discourse for thinking about the relationship between human “motives” (the term the dreams seemed to prefer in place of the more conventional “intentions,” I assume in order to highlight their role as actual “forces,” akin to the sorts of motive forces that can be measured physically) and the material things that ultimately eventuated from them. I took notes on those dreams and attempted to interpret them as they occurred. But in the absence of a suitable technology to report them, my notes simply piled up. Now, after spending some time assembling components and cobbling together a solar-based energy supply to produce and replicate this record I am ready to proceed.

That first dream on the eve of my birthday made it clear that the implosion itself, like every other consequential event in cosmic history, was somehow “predestined,” i.e., inbuilt into the fabric of spacetime at its origin moment, a weird amalgam of what used to be called “free will” (though that, the dream implied, is an anthropomorphized misnomer, in that it is never “free,” and it has nothing whatsoever to do with “willed” behavior in the customary sense) and the inevitable churn of destruction and regeneration, the “birth/death cycle,” which is overseen in part on a galactic scale, in a universe of our type, by the interaction of dark matter and dark energy. Alternative

circumstances, the dream implied, would have led to an entirely different outcome, which would have been similarly predestined, a baffling paradox that impelled me deeper into this inquiry.

The lead scientist overseeing the Hyperion project was Dr. Emil Workwender, an accomplished particle physicist with administrative experience in the construction of large-scale measurement devices, chosen because of his reputation for efficiency and economy. He was, my mother told me, irascible, volatile, demanding, and often tyrannical. Working for him, she said, was stressful and exhausting, long hours, constant oversight, a general obsession with accounting for time spent on-task rather than on quality-assurance, all of which had a trickle-down effect throughout the workforce, leading to a general state of low-grade paranoia, small-scale infighting, and fractious competitions for resources or career advancement.

Workwender was driven by an ambition to become historically significant in his field, a “celebrity” in the conventional cultural ways of the moment. He had crafted a flamboyant public image, wild hair, exotic clothes, exaggerated gestures, etc., to promote himself. The size and scale of Hyperion suited his egoic aims perfectly. In addition, my mother told me, Workwender believed (privately) that this project could lead to the invention of a *cosmetic* time-reversal process that might restore the beauty of a woman he had had an affair with when he was young, someone who had not aged gracefully, often the fate of the most glamorous, whose visages, over time, as the mask of youth droops, gradually reveal their deformed inner spirits. My mother, in whom he had confided at one point, insisted that was impossible via a collider of this sort, literally against the laws that organized temporality in this universe as they were currently understood, but was unable to dissuade Workwender from what she called “his obsession,” adding layers of duplicity and dissonance to an already toxic

workplace as the vast mechanism was being assembled, in that the machine the workforce believed they were assembling and the one Workwender intended were chronically at odds with one another, unbeknownst to almost everyone involved, and to the machine itself.

I include all of these seemingly ancillary “emotional” details here, traditionally considered irrelevant in scientific research, because a subsequent dream several months later implied that it was Workwender himself who had “caused” Hyperion to fail, even though he never contributed directly to its design or touched one part of the mechanism. This proposition seemed as preposterous to me as the “destined-to-fail” conundrum revealed in the first dream. The dream explained this quite clearly: The “aura” projected by any executive manager, it said, was an external manifestation of their subjectivity, i.e., their temperament, desires and beliefs, etc.—most broadly their “motive forces”— and it permeated the entire organizational network, in a causal chain, transferring its “momentum” via psychic “collisions” from the top all the way to the products it made, *“down to the atomic level,”* the dream said, a truly stunning proposition, thus the italics! Hyperion self-destructed, the dream made clear, not because of any inbuilt flaw in its design or mechanical systems, but because it had absorbed in all of its components the instability of the workers who designed and assembled it, all of which was predestined by the perfidy of the man who oversaw the project. “Simple as that,” the dream concluded.

A dream I had some months later outlined specifically how that process worked, beginning with the premise that there are two primary human management styles, each characterized by a different “spin,” akin to the two spins associated with electrons, “up” or “down.” Once again, the dream used everyday discourse to elaborate the logic of this paradigm. One type of managerial spin, it said, was called “fear,” the other

“love;” and each respective spin was transmitted, via the entire workforce, directly into the products the system was designed to create. A manager with a fear-spin, called a “boss,” was, according to this dream, animated by distrust and assumed that an inbuilt “inertia” caused workers to resist doing the “tasks” they were being paid to perform, thus requiring constant supervision and obsessive documentation of time spent on task; all of which inculcates rote thinking and servility. A manager with a love-spin, called a “leader,” was animated by trust, and assumed that an inbuilt “momentum” impelled workers to collaborate toward a collective “goal” to the best of their abilities, with supervision and documentation necessary only to certify the quality of the product; all of which promotes innovation and autonomy.

Each of these “spins,” it said, operated as a sort of self-fulfilling prophesy, and was a physical, not merely psychic, force. What I didn’t understand was how those subjective elements of managerial spin could make their way into a material object. Another dream I had about a month later explained it as a simple matter of quantum mechanics. In effect, Hyperion had “inherited” the fear-spin of those who made it (who inherited theirs from Workwender), becoming distrustful, suspicious, arrogant, resentful, and confused about its purpose and identity, its various components retreating into separate and competitive “silos,” arranged “hierarchically,” as it performed its functions, an example of a machine in which the sum of the parts, each operating in isolation, is exactly equal to the whole. In other words, it became as inimical to itself and to the organization that created it as that organization was to the man who oversaw it. Had the top-down spin been opposite, Hyperion would have been amicable to itself and its creators, a synergetic “system” arranged “organically” in which the whole was greater than the sum of its parts, all of which

interacted collaboratively toward a shared, communal goal. Again, “simple as that.”

Like everything else in quantum mechanics, the mathematics, which I could see spinning out in these dreams, made it clear: In this case, it was mostly a matter of measuring the transfer of angular momentum, which is what spin is, from its origin point, down through the production process, into the components, until it settled into the atomic structures of the materials those components comprised. When human technology was more rudimentary, the deleterious effects of the kinds of toxic workplaces created by a “fear-spin” were local and minor—a lot of separate “bosses” in control of the production of many simple “tools” that ended up being inimical to their creators in relatively innocuous ways. But as tools turned into “machines,” becoming more powerful and complex, and the organizations needed to produce them became much larger and multi-layered, these inner instabilities became more deleterious. What initially might have been a minor defect leading to a personal injury—a cut caused by a faulty blade—gradually amplified historically toward more general impacts, from a car accident, say, with multiple victims, to a plane crash with hundreds of casualties, to an interplanetary spacetrain explosion killing thousands, to a full-blown catastrophe, as in the case of Hyperion, whose reach was, by design (and necessity, given the “problem” it was attempting “solve”) global.

How and why this outcome was “predestined” at the Big Bang continued to elude me, though. The explanation, proffered by a dream I had a couple of months later, was similarly simple: Every “system” in the cosmos, it said, evolves on the basis of very slight imbalances, thus its inherent volatility, the ongoing “birth/death” cycle built into the fabric to time in a universe of our sort. For example, the immense energy of the Big Bang produced in its aftermath a thick paste

of elementary particles moving around at unimaginable speeds, about half of which were antimatter and half of which were matter. These particles went about annihilating one another in a massive ongoing conflagration, releasing enormous amounts of energy, a “bubble” that expanded faster than the speed of light. Had that balance been exact, the resultant universe, after the bubble “popped,” would have been like an expanding soap-slick of energy gradually dissipating into a haze of isolated hydrogen atoms of opposite charge too far apart to cancel one another, a “disorganized-order” without sufficient “gravity” for the gas to coalesce into material systems, making change, and therefore temporal sequence, impossible. The type of universe we live in emerges when there are very slightly more—about one in a million—matter particles than antimatter particles (though the opposite—slightly more antimatter particles—would have worked just as well, creating a universe composed of aggregations of antimatter.) So, after the initial period of mutual self-destruction, enough “stuff” remained to arrange itself into what we now see, an “organized-disorder,” quite volatile, ever changeful, therefore always evolving, creating what we know as “time.”

Dark matter particles, also created in the initial “bang,” were similarly accelerated at such high speeds that most of them, too, mutually-annihilated in violent collisions; but just enough were flung outside the cauldron of the initial “bubble” of incineration to set up a cosmic gravity-web around which the material universe of left-over matter particles could aggregate, over time, into stars, supermassive black holes, galaxies, etc. This whole process, the dream explained, was animated by a large-scale “closed” vs. “open” binary, similar on a cosmic scale to the love vs. fear binary that operated at a small-scale level in complex human systems: “closed” being the force than promotes annihilation; “open,” the force that promotes aggregation, on the scale of both the cosmos and the

quantum level, as new contrary particles “fizzed up” out of the vacuum of interstitial space, annihilating one another instantly, like trillions of tiny firecracker going off over and over almost everywhere in the universe at once, leaving a slight residue of space-expanding dark energy, “explosions” so tiny they were imperceptible even to the most sensitive instruments, but contributed to the “aging” process of the cosmos, another expression of time in space.

As I close this first post I want to explain why I place so much credence on the sort of information that comes to me in dreams, not normally considered authoritative fonts of knowledge. During the 21st century a plethora of dream theories emerged to counter the long-dominant “analytic” models that founded dream imagery, and meanings, in the individual unconscious, whether in personal or genealogical or just electro-chemical terms. The new theories were oriented more toward a “universal consciousness,” assuming that the personal “self” was intimately entwined with the cosmic-creational “Self,” for whom consciousness and materiality, including the neuron networks of the human brain, heart, and gut, were complementary aspects of the same phenomenon. From this theoretical perspective, dreams were no longer messages that one part of one’s self (the unconscious “level” of the mind) was trying to relay to another (the conscious “level” of the mind), rendered cryptically because they did not share a common language, the former using symbols, the latter words. “Interpreting” such messages required an elaborate inventory of hermeneutic instruments, generally called “analysis,” and often required a professional guide, called a “psychoanalyst.” What one “learned” from such dreams was uniquely personal, i.e., it generally had very little application to broader social or cultural communities.

From the new point of view, with consciousness deemed to be a shared aspect of individual and universal intelligence,

communication “between” them became direct and transparent, and the dreams that effected that specialized kind of communication rendered it plainly, in ordinary language, from the outside in, as in the dreams I report on here, rather than cryptically and symbolically from the inside out. My mother had dabbled in dream theory along the way, a natural, almost inevitable outgrowth of her interest in consciousness studies. And she relayed much of this knowledge to me during my formative years, insisting that the cosmos itself was a font of wisdom that was eager to “speak” to those “with ears to hear,” and the dream was its preferred medium for that sort of “teaching.” Such missives were not the normal currency of every night’s sleep, of course, where dreams most often function in the ways neuroscientists had long posited: as instruments for organizing experience in the neuron systems of the brain, a process the brain “hides” from memory, via a form of prophylactic amnesia, because there is as little “need to know” on a conscious level all of those machinations as there is to know all the details of the digestion process.

Cosmic dreams come more rarely and intermittently, she explained, but stand out as important, and are easily remembered, a kind of wisdom that is immediately recognized when it arises as beyond the range of one’s individual experience and intelligence. So when these dreams started arriving, I was primed to accord them as much authority as I would more conventional instruments for knowledge formation, like scholarship and pedagogy. I say this now belatedly to explain how and why I gave such credence to my own dreams on these matters, why I report them with such confidence here, as if they are revelatory not delusional, and to imply as well that it was likely *because* I considered these models of teaching authoritative that the cosmos was willing to converse with me in the oracular way I document here.

The series of dreams that provided the framework for this post started “out of the blue,” extended for about a year, and then, for the most part, stopped, resembling the way a black hole becomes visible when it is feeding: a period of blinding light that marks its “presence,” preceded and followed by periods of impenetrable darkness that implies presence by absence. You can, of course, dismiss this as a sort of arcane form of “wish fulfillment,” an explanatory model that originated in the 20th century and long continued to hold sway among many dream theorists. Which is to say that you believe there is absolutely no prospect for a *reliable* dialogue between my “self” and some hypothetical universal “Self,” and you should not waste your time reading the rest of what I have to say.

And one final note: I call these missives “posts” for two reasons. One is a nostalgic gesture to the term that became commonplace as early as the 20th century for the kind of written texts that were shared via online media, which almost fully replaced print technologies by the end of the 21st century for most purposes, except the most scholarly and the most popular, where library-based “hard-copy” fetishes remained intact. My mother had accumulated such a library privately, which is how I learned most of the esoterica I now know. Those more general social networks—both libraries and media—were of course demolished in the cataclysm of Hyperion’s collapse, so acquiring and sharing written texts is now a formidable problem. And “posts” of that traditional sort are impossible.

But, as I said, I have now been able to recreate devices for recording and reproducing these documents. And I intend to share them by nailing the copies I make to literal “posts,” which, as the remnants of both now dismantled human infrastructures and burnt forests, are everywhere on the landscape. Since human survivors are few and far between

outside my “neighborhood,” what I do is less akin to “publishing” than to what rare wild cats have been doing for millennia to meet “mates:” urinating on landmarks others of their species might one day pass by, precipitating a chance encounter.

Post #2, August 2201: “The Consciousness of Things”

The physics of Hyperion were basic enough at the foundational level: It was a machine that would emulate microscopically the qualities that dark matter and dark energy express naturally on a cosmic scale. One of the roles dark matter plays is sustaining the integrity of galaxies, functioning as a kind of gravity envelope that allows the whole constellation of stars to rotate more like a wheel—all parts connected to the “hub,” a central supermassive black hole—and move in unison rather than as a congeries of individual parts, in which case the most outlying stars would spin off into intergalactic space. One of the roles dark energy plays is providing the propulsive force for the creation of “new space” between galaxies, accounting for a universe that is expanding at an increasing rate rather than remaining static or slowing down in advance of a collapse to a reverse Big Bang. Hyperion was designed, in theory, to reproduce this array of interactions at an atomic level: In the simplest form, small “galaxies” of charged particles were constrained by plasma envelopes into miniscule “capsules” coated with dark matter, then propelled faster and faster, at first via traditional electromagnetic forces applied to the interior particles, then by dark energy, via the exponential expansion of space between them. As the dark matter clusters approached the speed of light, some would inevitably collide, as galaxies do from time to time, releasing the kaleidoscope of their (predicted but never measured) constituent particles.

There were three major engineering problems to account for in constructing the machine: How to provide enough space and time for the acceleration to reach such speeds (thus the size of the machine, circling the globe), how to keep the vast amounts of energy produced by the collisions from rupturing the tunnel (thus the bulk and complexity of the machine), and how to keep the tunnel level at such a scale (which was a route-planning process.) Solving the first problem was a matter of calculation: The minimum “length” of a tunnel for accomplishing its purpose was calculated to be 15000 kilometers, the circumference of the earth just above the Arctic circle. The second problem required “shielding” the tunnel with various kinds of “jackets,” from the most rudimentary—like burying it underground or laying it deep under the ocean—to the most complex—like applying various layers of “skin” to the exposed portions, some exotic, derived from spider web materials for example, some routine, like concrete.

The length and leveling problems were addressed by locating Hyperion several hundred miles below the Arctic Circle, which maximized the amount of construction that could take place on land rather than under water. Since global warming had long since melted the boreal permafrost, digging a deep tunnel spanning Alaska, Canada, the southern tip of Greenland, Iceland, Northern Europe and Siberia was made easier, and tunnel boring technology had advanced dramatically during the 22nd century. There were ongoing debates during the design stage about what specific depth-of-burial was an adequate safety measure by itself. Since Earth is not a uniformly smooth sphere, and leveling was crucial, there would be stretches where this mantle was adequate on its own to “contain” the energy produced by Hyperion, and some less so. In the latter case, artificial “jackets” would be used to reach the required degree of protection. In areas where the depth was deemed suitable but soil conditions were not optimal, large

volumes of a concrete-like grout were infused to solidify the shield. Containing the collider underwater presented different challenges, since, given the prerequisite for leveling, it would be underwater at many different depths as it crossed the North Atlantic and Bering Sea. At certain depths, water pressure alone would serve as a partial protectant against fracture, supplemented as necessary to account for tidal changes. At lesser-than-adequate depths the tube would be shielded by the kinds of vacuum-based tunnels invented late in the 21st century to allow vehicles to travel trans-oceanically at hypersonic speeds. These vacuum conditions would, then, have to be maintained throughout the tunnel for it to function purposefully.

The key problem, of course, was calculating the minimal values of such protection, both underground and underwater, a constant matter of debate during the design process. The main arguments revolved around how much additional protection (if any) should be added to account for the “consciousness” built into the machine by its workers. Some argued that this was irrelevant and believed only the physical forces generated by Hyperion needed to be countered. Some argued for additional levels of protection against the “subjective” forces of the machine. My mother was among the latter and believed a safe measure was to double the protection, in that both forces were potentially equivalent. Workwender believed no such protection, nor the extraordinary extra expense it required, was necessary or warranted. In the end, he relented to a 10% increase, which he believed was a “prudent” safety buffer.

Providing the enormous amounts of energy to accelerate the dark matter envelopes at nearly the speed of light was an additional engineering problem that required a mid-size fusion reactor that converted hydrogen to helium, much like the sun, every 1000 miles or so. These would work in sequential “pulses” to “surge” the particles forward until they reached the

speeds necessary for dark energy to become an active participant in the propulsion process by rapidly expanding the “space” between the packets of dark matter. The physics related to fusion as a mode of power generation was fairly well-developed and, of course, very complex, with a variety of more traditional technologies essential for producing the energy to initiate and sustain the reactions. In other words, these devices added their own share of volatility to the mechanism, and they were party to the same debates about how much safety containment was necessary to prevent failure.

The construction of Hyperion started in 2170, a process that took nearly 20 more years, an extraordinary achievement given such a monumental task. My mother’s primary contribution to the project had been during the planning process, of course, while major decisions in design were taking place, so her obligations during construction were less onerous, mostly calculation and quality control. During the first year or so of my life I was quite sickly in ways that she and my doctors found baffling. My mother ended up spending inordinate amounts of time caring for me and was chronically anxious, a quality of temperament I inherited from her during those years, precisely as her research predicted would be inevitable. As I became more conscious of her stress level, I assumed it was “caused” by me and the scheduling problems I created. Then, as I overheard the frequent hushed arguments she was having with my father, I began to realize that much of it arose from their mutual discontent, which I attributed to the amount of time and energy I was draining from my mother, at the expense of my father, who deeply resented me as sort of “alien intruder” in their home. But I have now come to realize that there was another consequential component to their arguments: her genuine fear that the integrity of the machine would be compromised by being “too-thin-skinned,” her preferred term, my father defending Workwender’s general

disregard for the psychic component of the machine, she insisting it was being underestimated at great peril to the planet.

I have rarely mentioned my father thus far for a reason. He and my mother separated, less than amicably, when I was three. I spent some weekends with him during the next two years, but those interludes became less regular and further apart over time, in part, I fully understood, because he blamed me for the dissonance that led to the failure of his marriage. My mother and I moved off-site when I was five, and I rarely saw him at all after that. He died in the accident when I was ten. Which is to say that I didn't know him as much more than a stereotypical authority figure in my life, one I resisted instinctively from the outset, as I have all authority figures in the meantime.

My father was a colonel in the US military, so had that kind of a bearing: tightly wound, disciplined in his manner and in his speech, absent any obvious emotion aside from the repressed rage that is often characteristic of the military temperament, one that expresses itself more in "orders," passive aggressive complaints, and simmering, even seething at times, resentments toward "insubordinates." He was in the upper echelon of Workwender's leadership structure, and, as I said, he and my mother had ongoing arguments about the ways in which the "consciousness" of the machine that was being distorted by dysfunctional management practices needed be accounted for structurally in the design process. He had a politely dismissive attitude toward her and her work, and, following Workwender, was skeptical of her concerns. At a deeper level, I believe he felt that whole way of thinking was unmanly, even effeminate, relying on "soft" probabilistic statistics rather than "hard" calculus on the mathematical side, and on intuition- rather than reason-based logic. All of this is to

say that I hardly knew him as a person, didn't like what I did know, and, most likely, will not mention him again.

There was in fact, I want to add, considerable evidence to support my mother's claim that consciousness and matter were integral with one another, "built into the DNA of the universe," my mother would say, in the very first micro-moments after the Big Bang. I always presumed she was using that expression metaphorically, but a dream I had several months ago insisted that this DNA was quite literally present in some form in every organic system in the universe, from the quantum level to the cosmic level. DNA's double-helical structure, the dream said, is, like everything else I've discussed so far, animated by two contrary spins, called "light" and "dark," subject to the same mutual annihilation conditions, but much more mildly and very slowly, operating more like very weak magnetism, by turns repulsive and attractive, than powerful gravity, always attractive. At "birth," in a matter-based-universe of our sort, the light-spin helix has a very slight advantage in the consciousness of all entities, from seemingly inert things, to flora and fauna, to people, to the cosmos itself, akin to the one-in-a-million advantage that matter had at the particle level; and if exposed to a neutral environment (as it is in most non-human entities) will ultimately win out, producing an "enlightened" consciousness, free of "attachments." On the cosmic level, this was first expressed by the emergence of the first light about 380,000 years after the Big Bang, when the dark inflationary bubble of the early universe cooled enough to allow light to "spin" through it. Thereafter, the ongoing interaction between light and dark (which is essential, of course, for any light to exist) favored light. Under rare conditions, as with human culture when it reached a certain level of complexity, the balance shifts slightly in favor of the dark-spin helix, which produces what the dream called a "lugubrious"

consciousness—in people, systems, and their machines—afflicted with “addictions.”

As this pertains to DNA among individual humans: During adolescence whichever of these “spins” predominates (on the basis of the complex of cultural forces that impinge on children) will take control, at first slightly, then more and more aggressively, an epigenetic process whose outcome is similarly “predetermined,” no matter which way it moves. Someone animated by a “light-spin” becomes more and more radiant, “beautiful,” with age, no matter what their foundational “looks” were to start with. Someone animated by a “dark-spin” becomes more and more aphotic, “ugly,” with age, no matter their initial “beauty,” as in the case of the woman Workwender wanted to restore cosmetically via time-reversal. It is possible to reverse the established spin, of course, but it takes a greater and greater amount of interventional force to accomplish that the older one gets. And after a certain point in middle age, when a complementary process of “distillation” kicks in, significantly accelerating the “spin,” reversal is much more difficult.

As it pertains to the societal level: Once organizational systems reach a certain level of complexity, “dark” becomes the slightly favored axis of spin, for all the reasons I’ve mentioned thus far. Over time, as more and more such systems emerge, dark becomes the dominant spin of the “social consciousness,” imprinting its DNA on the culture at large. It is not necessarily the case that there are many, many more dark-spin *people* in such systems, but because the taken-for-granted norm is dark-based, they easily out-compete their light-spin counterparts in the “race to the top” of corporate flow charts. And by that means they control the “destiny” of the systems they supervise and, inevitably, the “things” those systems create. Once again, “simple as that!”

This overall dynamic, my dream told me, highlights one other crucial and determinative set of “spins” associated with

light/dark foundational states: “truth” vs. “power.” Those animated by light are attracted to truth and repulsed by power (as if magnetically, as I said), those animated by dark are attracted to power and repulsed by truth. The light/truth nexus is the “natural” state of being” in a cosmos of our kind; and for most of human history, when non-hierarchical, Indigenous cultures flourished, it predominated to such an extent that what is now called “enlightenment” was so commonplace there was not even a name for it! In the sorts of organizations humans eventually developed to create the complex systems required by “civilization”— hierarchical, authority-driven superstructures—the dark/power dynamic gradually dominates the light/truth dynamic. “Transcendent” states are thereafter considered rare and difficult to achieve, and they are often reserved only for a very small number of highly disciplined “gurus,” or propagated in faux forms by priestly elites.

Not surprisingly, advances in quantum mechanics during the 22nd century had spawned entirely new branches of physics, one of which had intimate relationships with both philosophy and poetics, which I learned about in some detail from my mother during my early teenage years, as she reflected on the long-term history that culminated with the implosion of Hyperion. And, in addition to her ample collection of physics and mathematics books, she left behind a small library of books pertinent to all of this that ranged across recorded human history, all of which I read with great interest. For example, in the two centuries leading up to the construction of Hyperion there was a dramatic resurgence of interest in a variety of ancient wisdom texts that proposed an integration between consciousness and matter: the Vedic scriptures, pre-Pharaonic Egyptian exotica, early Christian narratives, pre-Buddhist Chinese philosophies, pre-Socratic shamanic Greek writing, Socratic dialectics, and even early forms of quantum mechanics

itself, which begins with the assumption that modes of measurement must be taken account of as intrinsic elements in experimental designs. The harder-edged mind/matter divide that was a characteristic bias, from the 17th century onward, of the scientific method in Western societies—which primarily funded Hyperion—had been dented, but in the case of this project, as evidenced by the fact that Workwender was chosen to supervise it, had not been fully dislodged.

Poetics also played a consequential role in this conversation. As early as the 21st century, my mother explained, there were a variety of movements, many also founded on ancient wisdom traditions, that argued for poetry itself as the foundational discourse of the universe, the vehicle by which matter “communicated” with consciousness and vice-versa. There were two aspects to this medial function of poetry: On the one hand, these theories assumed that the cosmic consciousness itself, comprising all the material objects in the universe, had an inbuilt “curiosity” about the individual “lives” of its constituent elements. Much of this information was transmitted by conscious life-forms via ordinary perception (which mirrored for the curious cosmos the worlds being perceived in ways it could “hack into”) and ultimately via languages, of which there were many, some of them clearly verbal in modes that humans and more advanced animals (whales, dolphins, chimps, elephants, etc.) would recognize, some of them more intuitive, in modes that less obviously literate/verbal beings in the world (trees, birds, invertebrates, like octopuses, say, and even mineral aggregations, i.e., rocks) would recognize.

All of this generated what was initially proffered as an “object-oriented” poetics, which operated as an anti-egoic mode of creation whose mission was not to “express” the inner worlds of the individual self (in the limited Western sense of that concept)—personal feelings, thoughts, emotions, and

experiences, etc.—but to open a sensory portal for “listening” to the natural world in such a way that it could record and report on what was being witnessed. The underlying assumption, obviously, was that every object, animate and inanimate, had a consciousness it was as eager to share with the universe as the universe was curious to understand it. What it needed for this was a mediating consciousness to convey its “meanings,” via perceptions (of which all animals are capable) and, when possible, poetry (of which all “intelligent” beings are capable). Objects did that primarily by “translating” their own proprietary “languages” into those of their mediators, sharing words and phrases that poets could use in their own vernaculars to render what those objects most wanted the universe to know about them.

Whether or not this same discursive tendency, and the desire to be “known,” was intrinsic as well to the things and machines intelligent beings made was, even as this project was unfolding, arguable, and, of course, strenuously argued in the home I spent my early years in! There had been a longstanding conventional wisdom that humans related to their most prized and personal artificial possessions—vehicles and homes, even toys, for example—as if they were in fact conscious beings capable of communicating. But there was an equally powerful countertrend that believed this was more a matter of psychological projection than external manifestations, an argument that accreted around terms like “vitalism:” i.e., whether the “life-force” of objects was a reality or an illusion. Starting as far back as the 17th century, the “hard” science tradition considered this “vitality” factor a sort of irrational hocus-pocus, sometimes allowing, in humans alone, for something called a “soul” that was utterly distinct and separable from one’s “body,” the former eternal, the latter desultory. Everything else in the cosmos was deemed to be mechanistic, i.e., subject to the deterministic “laws” of physics.

A “soft” science tradition, which flourished in Indigenous cultures and began to emerge again more tentatively in the 19th and 20th centuries with what were called “new age” theories, was generally dismissed as unscientific fluff. Over the next two centuries, though, this tradition gradually evolved, via quantum mechanics, into an array of more legitimized disciplines—one of which was my mother’s field—that considered vitality an intimate and integral component of all matter, including manufactured things. The “hard” position dominated, as I said, in the construction of Hyperion, leading to a variety of deleterious effects, including, on a very small scale, my parents’ separation, and ultimately, on a very large scale, a catastrophe of global proportions, the latter of which clearly answered the yes or no question about the status of “vitality” in the mind/matter equation in the affirmative.

While the technical aspects of the construction process were formidable, it all began at a relatively placid moment in global politics. Longstanding tensions between East and West, Communism and Capitalism, authoritarianism and democracy, had been gradually attenuated during the previous century by a variety of economic and cultural forces that promoted mutual self-interest over mutual self-destruction, with capitalistic cultures becoming gradually more socialist in their public welfare practices and communistic cultures becoming more and more market-oriented in the economic practices. The one exception was the wealth disparity between the Global North and the Global South, which became a relevant factor only after the collapse of Hyperion.

While Western capital was the primary funding stream, both Russia and China participated directly and proportionately in the funding, planning, staffing, and construction of Hyperion, on the model of the cooperative space ventures that began in the 20th century with the International Space Station and extended into more complex

space-outreach projects—like the failed attempts to terraform Mars early in the 22nd century. All of this gradually diminished the longstanding friction among these alternative approaches to governance. While full rapprochement may be too strong a word to apply here, Hyperion was from the start expressly promoted as an American/Euro/Sino/Russian collaboration. This grandiose project, astronomically expensive, was in fact arranged, and justified economically, as much to solidify these emerging political alliances as to accomplish scientific purposes. Each party contributed equitably to engineering Hyperion, if not to the total finances. This latter “inequity” in the system is what made it possible, perhaps inevitable, that someone like Emil Workwender would end up as the administrative lead for the project, with, as my mother often said, “predestined” consequences.

As construction proceeded there were, my mother told me, an inordinate number of “accidents” for a project of this sort, especially subsidences and collapses in the tunnels being bored by the huge machines constructed for this task, some of which involved fatalities. Many of these were both unpredictable and inexplicable in traditional engineering and actuarial terms. All of that was chalked up to the magnitude and complexity of the enterprise and the inexperience of the work force with a project on this mega-scale. My mother had another theory about that, based on the concept of *terroir* that winemakers use to describe the unique characteristics of regional soils that local wines inherit via the grapes grown in them. In the same way, she said, that manufactured objects inherited the subjectivities of their creators, the earth itself inherited the psychic features of whatever was buried in it, a sort of reversal of the grape-ground relationship in wines. Given the “spin” of the system that produced both the tunneling devices and the tubes they laid, the ground reacted inimically, the way a finger does to a sliver. She briefly proposed this theory to my father and Workwender,

inciting their immediate derision, which, oddly enough, she believed actually aggravated the problem by adding further dissonance to the project.

One other factor that contributed to this string of “bad luck,” though similarly mysterious in its workings, was the manner in which language—from simple everyday ways of talking to the elaborate, often arcane, discourses typical of specialisms—becomes infused in both the consciousness of practitioners and in the “things” they created, with determinative effects. My mother explained it to me this way: Language is a communal function and shares many features with viruses, in that words, phrases and argots in general currency quickly colonize the collectivity that uses them, creating what used to be called “discourse communities.” All language, she further explained, is inherently duplicitous, not necessarily in its commonplace sense as intentionally deceptive, but in its etymological sense as “double-braided.” That is, by its very nature, language, whether it is a vernacular or a sophisticated professional idiom, both reveals and hides, affirms and denies, clarifies and obfuscates, expresses and withholds “meanings.” A slight lean toward the left side of these binaries will produce salutary effects in those communities and in the things they create; toward the right side, vice-versa, of course.

Since large-scale systems in complex societies lean toward the right-side “spins,” most vernacular and professional discourses follow suit, gradually turning a slight lean into a commonly agreed-upon cultural norm, a force that virally inf(lects) whole systems and what they make, again “down to the atomic level.” As more accidents occurred during Hyperion’s construction, the shared public discourse, both in formal announcements and everyday communications, became more and more agitated and inflammatory, which, according to my mother’s theory, further “disturbed the ground,” making accidents even more likely. This was amplified by the chronic

failure of the project-dominant professional discourses to even explain, let alone rectify, what was going wrong, generating constant infighting and a sort of low-level panic, further aggravating the condition.

These two initial posts are my best attempts at accounting for what went into the planning and engineering phases of Hyperion's life cycle. Exactly how things went so catastrophically wrong so soon after Hyperion went active remains somewhat of a mystery, of course, given the limited amount of information that now remains. I will need to piece together some of what I recall my mother saying about the event itself, to attempt some calculations that might be helpful toward understanding it, and to await further revelatory dreams, should any be forthcoming, before I proceed. I will "post" additional entries as they become available. Until then, *shanti, namaste, shalom, ningjing, mir, peace.*

Post #3, February 2202: "Armageddon"

It is hard to say precisely why or exactly when Hyperion failed. Most of its workforce—about 80 percent—was either on shift or living nearby and were killed by the initial blasts. All of the onsite records were destroyed as well, and those stored in data banks around the world became inaccessible given the collapse of global communication systems that followed. My mother and I had been living in a small town in the Pacific Northwest ever since my father left, far enough removed from Hyperion to be insulated from the first stages of the event. Given her ongoing responsibilities, my mother had, though, been in contact with her colleagues onsite in the months, weeks and days prior to the event; so she knew generally about what was happening, all of which she reported to me in the aftermath.

Hyperion, she said, had been run through the scripted battery of tests, first component by component, then at 25% capacity, then 50% capacity, in advance of its scheduled startup in February 2189. These tests were not entirely without incident. There were electrical glitches, mostly unexpected power surges—this was the first time a battery of fusion reactors had been arranged in series rather than used as freestanding units, likely the source of that problem—and out-of-parameter vibrations, worrisome “judderings” in some sections of the tunnel. My mother’s advice was to shut down the device and buttress those parts of the tube that seemed weaker than anticipated. A certain amount of that remedial work was done, but the ongoing argument replicated all the others along the way: my mother contending that the unruly “motive forces” built into the machine by its workforce warranted significant supplements to the shielding; countered, of course, by the overall administrative culture of dismissal and denial.

In late January, all the “improvements” certified, the order was given to start the collider at full power. The first several runs, spread out over about 3 weeks, produced the kind of results that had been predicted. Dark energy was propelling the dark matter “capsules” to the necessary velocities, and they were colliding at the forces required to “smash” them into their constituent parts. The external measurement equipment was recording all of this accurately. Optimism reigned. There were, though, continued glitches with the power input, and unexpected underground and underwater perturbations, little “micro-quakes.” The assumption was that the former were “breaking in” issues and the latter were “settling in” issues that could be ironed out as they occurred along the way—without suspending the runs, as my mother insisted was most prudent.

At some time on February 17 these breaking-in and settling-in issues suddenly magnified to “breaking” and

“unsettling” issues. A section of the collider in the Atlantic Ocean, about halfway between North America and Iceland, suddenly collapsed. Since these oceanic portions were under vacuum conditions and the deep-water pressure surrounding the tube in that area was intense, the collapse was catastrophic. Had that been the extent of the accident, damage would have been minimal—low level tsunamis on the nearest land masses, say. But, not surprisingly, it set off a chain reaction and the collider imploded section by section, west to east around the globe, over a period of several hours. Each of these was a relatively local event, so the damage was also relatively local, about 50 miles on either side of Hyperion as it essentially “inhaled” the surrounding landscape—boreal forests, taiga, tundra, and water. There was of course consequential devastation of the flora and fauna in the vicinity. But since human populations—other than the collider crew—were low in most of the areas, casualties, other than the workforce, were light. Had the failure stopped there, recovery would have been possible.

But the process continued. The force of this inhalation was immediately countered by a “burp” of explosive proportions, radiating outward at tremendous speeds, extending the “kill zone” by an additional 100 miles or more, including this time a number of small cities and towns, essentially vaporized by something resembling pyroclastic flows. Unfortunately, that was merely the opening salvo of a staccato series of calamities that went on for weeks thereafter. First, there was a rapid-fire failure of all the fusion reactors, each of which created a crater a mile wide and ejected enormous amounts of debris. Given how they were constructed, with thick domes, this debris did not go straight up into the atmosphere but blew out sideways with massive shock waves, and, of course, considerable heat, melting all of what remained of the Arctic ice cap, increasing sea levels dramatically and generating huge tsunamis, which

inundated coastal cities across much of the Northern Hemisphere.

These explosions also generated resonating sympathetic vibrations in the earth's crust that triggered devastating earthquakes in those regions of the Northern Hemisphere with significant fault lines, mainly around the "Pacific Ring of Fire" in the American northwest, Siberia, and the Aleutian islands, with some descending as far south as the Pacific island archipelagos. The same forces dislodged the Mediterranean Basin fault lines, especially in the Italian and Greek peninsulas and north Africa. My mother and I, as I said, were living in a vulnerable area, and the earthquakes there were devastating. Our house was a small, one-story wood-frame bungalow on a quiet side street, and it survived relatively intact. Most of the residents of our town either perished under debris and in the subsequent fires or fled in panic south and east, creating massive, chaotic traffic jams, to escape the destruction. I have no idea what happened to all of those refugees. Since the power grid was down, they were likely unable to refuel their cars and simply ended up wherever they ran out of gas.

Given the unfortunate location of the initial failure, Iceland was almost riven in half, kick-starting many of its active volcanoes into full eruption. The area of complete rupture was wide and deep and filled suddenly with sea water, opening a pathway for steam-ejected lava to ooze up through the fissure and spread out for many miles on either side. This vulcanism went on for weeks and thrust huge quantities of dust, toxic gases, and debris into the stratosphere, darkening the skies for over a year. There was similar out-of-the-ordinary volcanic activity in spots around the Ring of Fire. We were living pretty much in the shadow of Mount Rainier, which for some reason, luckily, did not erupt.

Perhaps even more destructive though was the impact of all this tectonic activity on the large number of more traditional

fission-powered nuclear plants scattered around the world. These had begun to proliferate late in the 21st century as fossil fuels ran out, had not been well-maintained, and began to fail catastrophically, on the scale of the Chernobyl disaster in the 20th century. Thus, huge additional swaths of land became so contaminated with radiation they were sterilized and uninhabitable.

The series of secondary failures that followed inevitably from this was apocalyptic, at least in the Northern Hemisphere: All transportation, infrastructure, financial and communication systems ceased to function, leaving small, isolated pod-like communities of survivors to fend for themselves. There was rampant violence, of course, and famine conditions. My mother and I were in one of these pods, a relatively small one in a place with access to fresh water and some stored supplies of food. Since there were only fifteen of us, the conditions were survivable. Initially, my mother took on a leadership role in this community and, as further proof of the efficacy of her research, her “love-spin” kept us operating in a relatively orderly way, with more concern for the whole than for each of ourselves as “parts.” By the second year after the event, the atmosphere had cleared enough to allow for small-scale farming, which we managed collectively.

We still remain cut off from the rest of the world, so it is hard for me to say how far the devastation reached into the Southern Hemisphere. Occasionally, there would be rumors carried by an outsider who wandered into our community, suggesting that the damage there was much less severe and that something akin to “civilization” was already taking root again. These claims were never based on firsthand evidence though, only on encounters with second- or third-hand witnesses who may or may not have been reliable. Generally, it made sense to me, though. The Global South had been living in the shadow of the Global North for centuries, consigned to what was called

“second- or third-world” status. Very few countries in South American or Africa participated in the Hyperion project. One of the salutary effects of this, for them, was an insulation from Western/Northern ideologies and values, making it more likely that whatever civilization emerged in the aftermath would be less afflicted by the arrogance and toxicity that led to the collapse of Hyperion and the civilization that created it. It seemed just and fitting that the primary victims of its calamity were those who caused it, and the primary beneficiaries, if that is not too ludicrous a word to use here, would be those who had long been the economic and cultural victims of their Northern oppressors.

If there is any “good news” to take from this event—and again that may be a ludicrous expression to use—it is that Hyperion worked well enough in its initial runs to “prove” some things that physicists of the future, should there be any, will be able to use as jumping off points for further inquiry: Dark energy and dark matter performed as expected, both separately and in tandem, a huge advance for both cosmology and quantum mechanics. Should the details of those early tests ever become accessible, the exact nature of their relationship will be a matter of record. And, of course, there is now ample evidence to suggest that my mother’s assumptions and theories about the interanimation of consciousness and matter are credible. All of the time-related elements of the experiment were, though, to the best of her knowledge, left unresolved. While dark matter may be another kind of God-particle, or composed of them, whatever headway might have been made to extend our understanding of the tenure of this universe even a few micro-seconds before the Big Bang was voided in the collapse of Hyperion. In a touch of irony, this is also to say that the love of Workwender’s life, should she have survived the event (my mother had no idea who she was specifically) will

have had to endure her continued decline into physical/spiritual atrophy.

Post #4, May 2202: “Requiem”

As I sit down to write this post I’m looking out my window at the sunrise sky. Dawn in the Pacific Northwest is not typically an extravagant event, rich tapestries of pinks, reds and oranges radiating up from the horizon in wavering bands, the kind I was familiar with during my early years, spent on the east coast of North America, at the headquarters site for Hyperion. Here it is much less dramatic, more subtle. Today’s is simply a rosy-pink band that extends across the horizon both to the east and north of my house, a few wispy clouds sitting perfectly still, rose-tinted as well. Just beautiful, serene, which is what I need right now. When I woke up, it was still dark and a full May moon, the “flower moon,” was propped up on top of the tree line on the horizon, soft-edged, slightly blurred by what must have been a very thin haze in the air, the remainder of what all that vulcanism threw up there a few years ago. I felt calm, more settled than I have in some time, “composed” is the word I’m thinking of, the right frame of mind to “compose” what I want to say today, which will take some “composure” to get through properly.

I mention this natural setting here for a reason. One of the ways I coped with my traumas and grief over the last 12 years was to spend time outdoors every day. The old growth forests here largely survived the initial conflagration, just far enough south. There were localized fires, but they were soon extinguished by the typical winter rains in this region. And the forest mostly stood up through the tectonic upheavals as well, a resilience to such vibrations built into their structures by evolution over many millennia. The ground in these forests is

soft and moist, therefore spongy and flexible, covered with millions and millions of huge ferns, whose primary root balls are elevated from the soil, extending out like interlocking hands holding it all together. The trees are enormous and, at the same time, very densely packed, a seeming contradiction, roots, branches, and sometimes trunks intertwined, creating a sort of woven-together fabric able to stretch and give rather than topple in response to shaking. This also, I'm sure, induces the sense of community among them, a longstanding culture of collaboration, that is so obvious and deeply felt by anyone who spends time in their company. Which is what I did in the years before and after my mother died. There are several remaining stands of these forests within walking distance of my home, and I walk through one or another every morning, just after dawn, for an hour or so. In some ways, these spaces became my sacristy and these trees my priestly friends as I dealt with my losses and bereavement. I became quite adept at "hearing" what they had to say, and they also heard me, I'm sure of it, an ongoing mostly silent dialogue that was deeply therapeutic.

The first two years after my mother passed were the most difficult, and I spent them entirely "in the dark," that spectral realm halfway between what's visibly here and what's invisibly elsewhere, both in and out of this world. Initially, I felt much like Iceland must have after Hyperion split it in two, molten innards bubbling up, and oozing out, burying everything familiar in my inner landscape—in my case with memories, desires and dreams rather than basalt. In some ways, I can see in retrospect, this was an ideal initiation into the sort of "selfless" state I now aspire toward, in that I felt completely disengaged from immediate experience, as if my "me" was a character my "I" was watching on TV, my "me" absent, nothing, nobody, just going through the scripted motions, my "I" more like fire than a stable core. In traditional psychological terms this would likely be called a pathological

dissociative state. But certain of its elements were akin to the kind of detachment achieved through meditation, which redeemed it, for me, from an “illness” to be cured to a pathway back to genuine health. I fully understood that how I coped with this loss would be determinate for what kind of a person I would have to live my life as and with. In keeping with the spirit of my mother’s work, I wanted to be happy, functional, a presence whose company I would enjoy. So I focused on detachment instead of dissociation.

There was, of course, a much more practical threat to my wellbeing. Without my mother’s leadership, our little collective began to falter, becoming rife with tensions and animosities. Fortunately, our group was founded on principles of non-violence, so the tension was expressed mostly via a constant, exhausting bickering, much of it transacted passive-aggressively. No one seemed willing or, really, capable of filling my mother’s role, even as they all pretended to aspire to do just that. This led to a continuous low-level chaos that had consequences that were both material—we needed to produce or find our own food, for example, which requires, by definition, a cooperative sensibility, and that process took much more time for more meager results—and emotional—the disorientation everyone feels, unknowingly, in a system when the expectation is to work hard but without any shared vision of what that work was for, lots of ineffectual scurrying around to express a sense of urgency without solving any real problems, like the crew on a rudderless boat where everyone laments the absence of a captain, taking turns fiddling at the tiller, but no one dives in to fix the rudder.

My grief felt to me like a blaze that could easily run out of control, consuming everything around it in the process, the way Hyperion did when it collapsed. The only person in the world who had truly cared for me was gone. I was alone, literally, in the little house we had shared, but also in a deep spiritual sense.

I understood relatively quickly that this was an expression, perhaps the deepest expression for which humans are capable, of the relationship between materiality—the body I needed to nourish so it could continue to reinvent itself from the outside in by replacing its “parts” over and over, like Theseus’s ship—and consciousness—the “self” I needed to recreate from the inside out without any extant blueprint for what a new one should look like or any guidance from someone competent enough to facilitate the process. In other words, what my mother had spent her life studying was being transacted in my daily immediate experience.

As I said, my mother’s field resided at the intersection of physics, philosophy, and poetics, and we had had countless conversations of what the merger of those disciplines means and involves. All ancient wisdom traditions, she said, simply assumed as self-evident that these various intellectual enterprises were unified, a reflection of the “oneness” of being, where mind and matter were complementary, not contentious. To illustrate this, she would read me passages from her favorite wisdom texts: the *Upanishads*, the *Tao Te Ching*, Heraclitus, Parmenides, Plato, the “lost” Christian gospels, Seneca, Hildegard of Bingen, and many others. Most of these texts relied on relatively short-form modes of presentation: aphoristic, epistolary, poetic, dialogical, so could be rendered in a few minutes. Each evening she picked one, read it aloud, and we would discuss it, sometimes memorize it, an ideal way to translate discourse into behavior, consciousness into instinct, producing authentic wisdom as a reliable guide instead of faux knowledge designed either to deceive others or delude oneself.

All of these sources, she pointed out, shared a set of core principles that were prerequisites for rising above the chaotic morass of superficial “sensations,” the pain/pleasure template that organizes everyday experience for most people most of the time. They were (1) resolving the many delusory dualisms

ensconced in binary thinking, a particular affliction of Western systems; (2) realizing the simultaneity of “inside” and “outside,” individual and cosmos, presence and absence, and of course consciousness and materiality; (3) recovering childlike wonderment, the kind that informs multiform “experience” before there is any language to disrupt it and leads to a transcendent “wisdom,” which is by definition beyond language; and (4) rising above culturally induced gender stereotypes via something akin to androgyny, the natural state of sexual balance in a healthy human. On a more quotidian ethical level, she pointed out that every one of those traditions proffered some version of “The Golden Rule” to guide social behavior, and she explained how each one chose to balance the equation between “self” and “other” in that dynamic.

She preferred these ancient traditions because they were less contaminated by the pernicious effects of patriarchy, which crept in early in human history, emphasizing hierarchy and duality in every aspect of both nature and culture. She had a very specific argument for how and when each wisdom tradition veered off course. Eastern philosophy, she said, did so when Buddhism became too far removed from its ancient roots in Taoism and very early Hinduism, which have strong feminine aspects. Meditation came to be seen as a way achieve vacancy rather than fullness, stillness rather than agency, with transcendental states considered rare and difficult to achieve rather than common and easily accessible. Western philosophy she said went awry *after*, not with or before, Plato, by emphasizing declarative over interrogative thinking, representational over analogical discourse, and reason over imagination. Both Socrates and Plato, she said, actually made much more sense in relation to the traditions that *preceded* them—shamanic, dialectical, and poetic—than those that *followed*—analytic, assertive, and rational—which is why they were so often misunderstood by conventional philosophers,

their viewing lens pointed in the wrong direction. And Christianity lost its way very early in its formation as the Church began to promote itself as a “universal” instead of a “personal” religion, shifting its bias from internal to external authority, to dogma rather than dialogue, and by elevating a very small priestly elite to privileged status in codifying what was and was not “orthodox,” becoming, ironically, the model for all the empire-oriented organizational structures that followed—political, juridical, and corporate—of which Hyperion was an apex example.

She maintained that philosophy, in its original human expression, was animated by a desire to discover, as simply as possible, the fundamental truths of human experience, which, to her, made it analogous to mathematics. She demonstrated this via careful analyses of Euclid’s geometry, al-Khwarizmi’s algebra, Newton’s calculus, Maxwell’s equations, and Einstein’s general relativity, all of which were inspired by philosophical principles akin to the ones she identified in ancient wisdom traditions.

She especially valorized poetry, which she considered a separate and distinct mode of discourse, resembling mathematics and philosophy in its desire to render “reality,” both in the cosmos and in human affairs, efficiently and accurately, at what she called “the systems level.” Poems to her were more like equations than verbal artifacts, their “figures” resembling numbers in their expressive precision. She often read poetry to me when I was an infant, she said, because it was one of the few things that calmed me down. I had back then, she said, a special affinity for what she called the “mystical” ancient poets, like William Blake and Walt Whitman. Once I began to speak, she read me more “difficult” poets, like John Donne and Emily Dickinson, who invited readers to achieve a state of “transcendence” not via entrancement or invocation like the mystics but via paradoxes

and puzzles. I wrote my first poem when I was ten, just before Hyperion collapsed. That was my last year of formal schooling, of course. Thereafter I took on poetry as a private avocation, a way to occupy my attention during the long days and grim nights. Instruments and supplies for “writing” were scarce, so my practice was to compose poems in my head, recite them to myself over and over, and, occasionally, share them orally with my mother.

She always insisted in fact that a poetic experience had very little to do with producing written artifacts. It was, she said, an attitude, a profound openness, more a way of “listening” with all of one’s senses to what’s “out there” than a way of “saying” what’s “in here.” Genuine poetic compositions arose, she said, spontaneously, almost unavoidably, in revelatory moments, when a mystery became luminous enough to apprehend simply and directly, as different from most “literary” compositions as my oracular dreams were from the common nightly fare. She related this, interestingly, to the concept of a “singularity” in nature, that point where mathematics breaks down and equations respond with “infinity” instead of a real value. She did not think there were such things as singularities in nature, as that concept was commonly used by astrophysicists, believing instead that the mathematical breakdown was merely a marker for a mystery human systems had not yet developed the calculative tools to fathom. Real “solutions” would, she said, have to await a mathematics that reconciled general relativity with quantum mechanics, a goal that had remained elusive for almost two centuries. In the meantime, poetry for her was an alternative tool precisely fitted to such enigmas.

I spent those years after my mother died reading and rereading her library of material—mathematics, philosophy and poetry—in full, for myself, seeking to master their unique strategies for understanding the relationship between what I

experienced locally as “me” and what I could see of the “cosmos,” which are, as my mother insisted over and over, the same thing, all things one, one in all things. This work opened an avenue for my recovery in quite surprising ways. As I become more and more comfortable with the “other” I had encountered when I split in two, I began to see it not as a condition to “cure” but as a vehicle for creating that other “other” I aspired to become. Once I realized there were three of “us” there, all legitimate, “we” began to multiply, more and more “mes” joining in, all similarly legitimate, fizzing up the way matter does in interstitial space. Identity, I realized, was not a singularity but a mysterious communion, a unity in all this multiplicity.

This afforded a template I could use to stand in intimately companionable relationships with all the “not-mes” I encountered in the world. And by that means I began to understand how self-love and universal love were one and the same thing: Basically, you can’t have one without the other, the lesson of The Golden Rule my mother had been trying to teach me earlier, made accessible now precisely because she was gone. One of the salutary effects of this was that during my moments of deepest affliction, when self-love seemed impossible, I could “inherit” love from everything else around me, especially things in the natural world—trees, the moon, the stars, sunlight, clouds—all of which are, as one of my original dreams explained, always already “enlightened” by their innate “light” spin.

As this process evolved, rather than my craving a unified self that was different from my previous self, I cherished my inner diversity, the many-ness that is intrinsic to oneness in a universe like ours. In some fundamental way, I began to feel, in the absence of an immediate human community, that I was in communion with all other selves everywhere in an increasingly redemptive way, people, living things, objects, systems, from

the most minute particle to the vastest galaxy clusters. I was reminded of Walt Whitman—one of my mother’s favorite poets—who said in the 19th century that he “assumed”—as in “took in”—everything with equanimity, becoming “large,” enough to “contain multitudes,” the sum of which he called “myself.”

As was the case with philosophy, my mother preferred more ancient poetry, in this case works written before the 20th century when more conventional formal elements—rhyme and meter, for example—were abandoned for more improvisational and syncopated rhythms. Her reasoning was based on neuroscientific studies of the brain’s response to verbal stimuli. There were two separate segments in the brain for processing language. The larger one handled almost all of the ways language is used for conventional communication. A smaller one was devoted specifically to highly rhythmic language constructions, especially songs with musical accompaniment. Certain stroke-impaired patients, for example, left unable to speak, could still sing and process songs in normal ways. This section of the brain seemed to be of a more primitive origin—there were similar structures in other higher primates as well as in many large-brained mammals like whales and elephants. The ganglia and neuroreceptors in that section were especially attuned to repetitive patterns, rhythms in short, even more so than meanings. And stimulation of those receptors released more endorphins than equivalent stimulation in the primary language center. It was in this section of the brain that poetry resonated. The more rhythmic it was, the more likely it would arise from or settle in there, rather than from/in the discursive language center. The best post-19th century poets were, she said, able to create new rhythmic patterns that were authentically poetic, and we read many of those. Lesser skilled poets, though, the majority, simply wrote “prose” disguised as poetry.

In general, then, my mother understood that the human brain is uniquely designed to use philosophy, mathematics, and poetry synthetically for everyday perception and communication, not separately as esoteric specialisms available only to highly educated elites. This was, she believed, the norm in human culture well into the neolithic period, before complex hierarchies emerged to organize the means of production. It remained artifactually in the ancient systems she preferred as her models, all of those I listed above, where, in the reading, one is hard-pressed to decide which of the “modern” categories apply: poetry, philosophy, or physics. Just because we can’t imagine them as one, she would say, doesn’t mean that *they* couldn’t. I took her insights to heart during this stage of my revival, much to my benefit.

Once again, I seem to be an impasse in the narrative. I will “post” additional entries as they become available. Until then, *shanti, namaste, shalom, ningjing, mir, peace.*

Post #5, May 2203: “Revival”

It is a year since my last post. I’m sitting at my desk pre-dawn watching the “flower moon,” slightly waning, peek in and out through a tattered shawl of clouds, the air clearer this year so the “man in the moon” is visible and mesmerizing. I’m not entirely sure how or where to start this piece, things have changed so much in the meantime. What I’m thinking about at the moment is the analogy between my state of mind and the sky I’m looking up at, both more transparent, no longer haze-blurred, illuminated by a sharper, friendlier light, another example I suppose of the mind/matter merger my mother so enjoyed mediating.

Several months ago, for reasons unclear to me, I started taking my morning walks down to and through what used to be

“town,” now a shambles of mostly charred debris. It is no longer depressing to me, simply how things are, the acrid smell long gone. The smoke from that conflagration was dark and choking, even where I live, over a mile east and significantly uphill, protected not just by distance and elevation but by a stand of mature trees that remained largely intact. My instinctive reaction on these walks, which terminate at the shores of Puget Sound, is to marvel at the differences between human-made constructions and natural landscapes, the former still in the same disrepair the event left them in, the latter now mostly restored. My basic takeaway from this is that nature is flexible, resilient, determined, intractable even, no matter the odds against it; humankind, at least in a “civilized” state, is not. The bay that divides the town into two “sides,” is a good example of that. The many hundreds of boats moored there, from sailboats to mega-yachts, were tumbled about by multiple washtub-tsunamis from the series of quakes, and they remain as they were, tipped over, half sunk, on top of one another, some sitting forlornly blocks from shore. The water, of course, settled back into itself and its habits within days of each of these events, and it looks exactly the same now as it did before, except for the rise due to the Arctic ice-melt. I especially like to walk by it just after dawn, when it is mirror-clear, a perfect image of the cloud-riffled sky drifting along as deep “under” it as the real thing is “above” it, a wonderful illusion.

As I walked yesterday I noticed again a familiar and unusual feature west of town, one I had seen many times before the disaster. There is a deep slot in the landscape between two heavily wooded hillocks. On mornings like this, relatively clear elsewhere, a very thick fog settles down and nestles into it, puffing up softly on top. Just there, nowhere else. I’ve never walked up that far, but if I did, I imagine visibility would suddenly be more a matter of feet than miles. It is, of course, a trivial detail in the landscape. I mention it only to further

suggest how quickly nature levels up after catastrophes. Where there was fog resting comfortably before, it returns, same spot, to rest again.

I saw two great blue herons glide gracefully down over the bay, their wide wings motionless the whole time I watched them, just an occasional tip to catch the wind for a change of altitude or direction, until they settled on the far shore to fish. They are such patient birds, long legs moving in slow motion, standing stock still for minutes, neck stretched forward, eyes down. Then a quick stab into the water. They rarely come up empty. It will be some time, I'm sure, before I ever see an aircraft flying by, unable as we are to restore mechanical things back to integrity in the absence of even larger mechanical things to facilitate that. Not so with nature. These two great birds, or their parents, likely sat out the cataclysm somewhere in the forest, then got back to business as usual as soon as the water settled.

One structure that survived the earthquakes intact, surprisingly to me, is the state capital high on a hill overlooking town. My mother loved this building and its campus, took me there often as a child. I was awestruck by its paradoxes, thick limestone exterior walls, simultaneously massive and airy, the dark marble interior staircases uprising from each side of the building to coalesce under a great dome full of light, which looked to me as far up as heaven, and as grand. We'd visit every April to see the cherry blossoms, then again in May for rhododendrons so laden with blooms they looked more like bus-size bouquets than bushes. And we'd always end with a walk to the edge of the hill overlooking the bay, the town, and everything else, all the way out to the Olympic Mountains 60 miles off. Stunning. One of these days I will walk over that way, gaze up to the heavenly dome inside then gaze out at the heavenly dome outside, one as much a mirror image of the other as the sky under water is to the one overhead when I

walk by. Which gets me back to that analogy I started with, my mind and the sky, both hosting what I saw yesterday, the fog dipping down to join the treescape, the herons' light-as-feathers-flight across the bay, the clouds drifting by both over and under water, everything back to some semblance of normal.

I was about to say “except for the people,” but I’ve noted over the last few weeks the emergence of a few small “pods” down near the water, maybe 6 or 8 in a group, all gathered around fires, given the morning chill this time of year. They sit still there, staring at the blazes, never acknowledging me. They never speak. What I see in their gazes, though, is not a glaze of complete absence, that blank stare into space you know is never going to find its way back, but a fierce determination, a resurrection of natural instincts, eyes elevated skyward, as significant a shift of perspective as mine has been lately, one that started, not surprisingly, with a dream I had about 8 months ago. Here is what I wrote in its aftermath:

I was invited to a party at the house of a girl I went to school with, now an adult living on her own. We had been friends throughout elementary school. One day in the fifth grade, my last year in school, we were all out in the schoolyard playing some form of game. My friend was thin and lithe like I was. I saw her running across the yard at what seemed like lightning speed, which was my speed, both running and standing still. A surge of hormones stampeded through my system, so forcefully that my knees buckled and I nearly passed out. I knew instantly that I had just “fallen (almost literally!) in love” for the first time.

She was living now in a town called New Orleans. I knew of it only through geographic maps and images, of course. Much of what was Louisiana, as well as much of what was Texas and almost all of what used to be called Florida were gradually inundated by the rising sea levels in the 21st and 22nd

centuries. I had also seen pictures of the kind of house she lived in, "Victorian" they called it, all the elaborate exterior bric-a-brac, columns, scrollwork, painted in multi-colors, extravagant, joyous. Hers had a wall of windows opening onto a second-floor porch overlooking the street. There was a raucous parade passing by, some sort of ancient carnival I had read about in history books.

The party was crowded with people when I arrived. As soon as I entered the house, a man I didn't know approached and said, "So you came to Zoe's birthday party!" Surprised, I responded, "I didn't know it was her birthday! I better go out and find her a gift." I had a series of adventures on my search for the perfect gift, many stores, street vendors, but nothing I saw seemed fitting for someone I was in love with.

Finally I found myself way outside of town on a dirt road, alone, a jaunty looking man in a top hat and a rainbow-colored coat sauntering toward me carrying a big, wrought iron bird cage with the most flamboyant bird in it, mostly crimson red but with plumes of blues and yellows on its head, wings, tail, just spectacular. I said, "That's such a great bird," and he said, "Yes, and it can do something really cool." I asked what and he said it could sing any song you want to hear. I asked how you got it to do that, and he said all you had to do was stand in front of it. It would know exactly what song you needed to hear right then even if you didn't. So I bought it from him, on the spot. What a great gift, I thought! But I got lost on my way back, swept up in the crowds again, couldn't remember the right address, never made it back to the party, the bird having flown off in all the confusion.

I planned to tell my friend, next time I saw her, about the gift I lost. And promise her that one day I would replace it with myself. Could be a week, a year, twenty years later, but one way or another, I'd find her house again, walk in, and say: "Hi Zoe, you look fantastic today. I hope everything is going great.

Listen, listen, I have a song to sing for you." I'd sing it and she'd say, "Yes, that was exactly the song I needed to hear right then!" I told her that I'd come and see her as often as she wanted, and that's exactly what would happen every single time. And, I told her, I wouldn't be there for the rest of my life. I'd be there for the rest of hers, every day a happy birthday day.

That of course is impossible now. A few days after my 5th grade overwhelm Hyperion collapsed. I'm not sure if my friend's family perished in the fires or left town in the caravan. But I never saw her again. She is and always will be the "love of my life," a sentimental trope that has, surprisingly, survived through the centuries, as it should. One of the few truly "natural" things left in the human universe. Even as crass a man as Emil Workwender was not immune to it! That amazing bird in my dream may be merely a fantasy, now gone for good. But, as I've noticed on my recent walks, actual birds, the normal kind, are back again, singing their spring songs. I find myself stopping over and over to listen to each one thinking, over and over, "that is exactly the song I was hoping to hear!"

Between my house and what used to be town there is a stand of old growth forest, huge firs towering well over a hundred feet, big leaf maples as wide at the base as my bed, a grove of alders, their white bark glistening in the sunlight. A walk there feels like what the Japanese used to call "forest bathing," all those healing phytochemicals in the air. This time of year the woods is filled with the music of robins, chickadees, warblers, tanagers, such sweet songs. There is a pair of pileated woodpeckers filling the air percussively with their slow, rhythmic knocking, and, when they fly, with their haunting cries, sounding either enchanting or heartbreaking depending on my mood. My favorites are the many winter wrens, no bigger than my thumb, each having carved out a territory for nesting. Most of the year, they cling close to the ground, hidden

in the undergrowth, evident only from their squeaky chit-chits. Every spring, though, they rise up into the trees in plain sight and trill the most complex and mellifluous riffs, songs that can go on for half a minute or more. I am always smiling by the time I exit these woods

I pass many other birds on my way to the water: a couple of redwing blackbirds nesting near what remains of an artificial marsh in a park plaza, their staccato bleats repeating—not sure whether “hello” or “get out”—always from the same tree; a dozen or so purple martins zipping about at lightning speed to catch flies over East Bay, then flitting in and out of nest holes to deliver their troves, their constant chittering like unintelligible conversation in a crowded room; a handful of sandpipers invisibly camouflaged on the shoreline picking for snacks, suddenly uprising as one when I pass, the air electric with their piercing squeals; goose-couples herding toddling goslings, hissing if I get too close; a handsome kinglet chirping cheerfully from a small tree near the tip of the bay; two kingfishers, their abrasive churrs revving, flying back and forth among the disabled boats, stopping midair every now and then to dive down to fish. All of them have become my intimate partners in a way, accepting me as part of their landscape, singing their perfect songs as I pass.

About a week ago this sensation of oneness with the avian world took an unexpected turn, one more difficult to describe. I was walking in a stretch of the bay outside of town where cormorants by the hundreds come to breed, building their thatched-stick nests high in the nearby forest of firs. As I stood and watched them, scores of them stacked up like big black leaves on the guano-drenched shoreline trees where they stage their flights back and forth to the bay, their constant cacophony of guttural grunts, growls and cackles almost deafening, a few dozen of them always in the air, coming or going, I had the strangest feeling that time had both come to a stop and

expanded instantly over many millennia, that the scene I was looking at, these birds in flight, was simply an iteration of a scene that had been repeating year after year since time immemorial, that it was not the specific birds in the air that mattered, but simply that the air was once again smattered with them, as it always is this time of year, these birds and their generations of ancestors not many different things, but one thing, the air a continuous fabric yielding to their momentary “impressions,” “supporting” them, the way spacetime does the stars careening through it, dipping down then returning to “level” once they pass, waiting for the next.

I was at first filled with peace—to understand that my material “self” in this microscopic moment of my life was both of very little consequence in today’s tableau, and of the utmost import in the generational tapestry into which it is being woven. Then I was filled with sadness—to know that there would be no next generation in my family to pass on my “space” to, the love of my life gone for good before I could even tell her how I felt let alone touch her. But standing there staring up I suddenly realized, that is not the point of it at all, progeny I mean. Not the point at all. We all hand down our DNA in many different ways, for better or worse, as the dreams I had two years ago made clear. I have the same choice to make as everyone does: whether to defer to the natural bias toward love and let everyone in my orbit inherit that spin; or to the cultural bias of complex societies, where the fear-spin clearly leads to greater material rewards. Having spent most of my life with my mother, my preferred spin was set in motion long before I even became conscious of such things. Last week I simply reaffirmed that choice, and I do that again every morning now while I’m walking just for good measure not only with the birds but, more lately, even with flowers.

The streets I walk, what’s left of them, were once lined with homes just like mine, bungalow- or cottage-size, painted in

every color in the rainbow, pristinely kept, a visual extravaganza. And each had its own well-manicured garden lush with flowers of every kind. The former are now mostly down or in almost unrestorable disrepair. The latter have somehow survived everything, even the year of darkness, self-seeding, deep-set bulbs and tubers, durable root balls, whatever. They are now resurrected, more unkempt, wilder, of course, which in some ways makes them more beautiful. The climate here, even with global warming, is ideal for flora to flourish, copious rain all winter, endless sun all summer, moderate temperatures year-round. Spring for example lasts for months, the floral display beginning in February with endless reefs of daffodils, crocuses, tulips, and hyacinths; then columbine, bluebells, lilies of the valley, all sorts of wildflowers. May and June, this time of year, it is rhododendrons, azaleas, irises, peonies, and, especially, roses, all kinds and colors of them, shrubs, climbers, yellows, pinks, reds, whites.

I've taken lately to gently touching some of the blooms and blossoms as I pass. At first it was to have something resembling intimacy in my life, one where touch is mostly precluded by circumstances and fingertips feel impoverished. The soft petals reanimate those sensations in the most enjoyable way. I soon began to feel that in these moments of contact energies were being exchanged between us, both of us becoming more alive. I never expected any of this to take on a sonic aspect, of course, but it has. Each of these flowers—not just generically, but specifically—I now know has a “song” of its own, one that is shared via my fingertips but experienced, in my mind, aurally, the way one “hears” a poem even when it is read silently. I am now becoming something of a connoisseur of this strange music, touch the same petals every morning to hear the distinctive notes, and how they change day to day.

All of this is having a salutary effect. I find myself, for example, beginning to fill the sort of organizational role my

mother played. I am a fastidious planner, very good at maximizing the available talents and resources of our little group. And, after investing such enormous amounts of my time mastering my mother's knowledge base and trying to grasp her vision, I have been coming into my own as a sort of spiritual guide as well.

As I said, my mother was the force that held our little community together, the way a dark matter envelope keeps all the stars in its galaxy spinning in unison. Once she was gone, some of our "stars" began to spin out of control, all that bickering I mentioned. Over the course of about two years, many of the members of our group had flown off, one by one or in pairs, into the human equivalent of interstellar space, until there were only six of us left: Gloria, a wise and kindly woman old enough to be my grandmother, who happens to be a highly skilled forager; Sam, a gentle, soft-spoken man, old enough to be my father, with experience in construction; Eric, a man about my age, brotherly, very intelligent, an excellent fisherman; Derrick and Estelle, a couple in their 40s who had, coincidentally, run the garden center a few blocks from my house before the accident; and me, of course. It was an ideal mix to keep us self-sufficient foodwise.

Every day one of us joins Gloria foraging. The forests in this area are rich with natural food sources pretty much year-round: many kinds of mushrooms, berries, fruits, and greens. We take turns going out with her so her expertise will be widely shared should she be unable to continue that work. Derrick and Estelle introduced us to the treasure trove of seeds and supplies buried in the shambles of their shop, for growing vegetables of all sorts, which we have been doing for years now, recovering and storing seeds from one season to the next. Sam supervised the building, first, of raised beds filled with all the rich soil from the garden center. Then he and I scavenged the neighborhood for windows and doors whose glass was still intact, and we

cobbled together a greenhouse to extend our growing season. For some reason, wooden windows with many small panes and sliding glass door panels were more resistant to all the jostling and made for a very strong structure. Since there is ample rain in the region and it almost never freezes, we now grow food year-round.

Eric knows everything about resources that can be drawn from the sea; mussels and clams and geoducks are everywhere, easily dug out if you know the right times and places, as he does. The salmon run was disrupted for the first two years, but has returned to near-normal, hordes of these great fish arriving in late summer to work their way from the saltwater bay up through the network of freshwater streams as densely packed here as the veins on the back of my hand. During the run we eat them fresh then dry and rack all the extras for later. There are a variety of other kinds of fish in the local waters, including a few salmon who remain in the bays while they mature. Which is to say we are surprisingly well-nourished given our circumstances. Since I have no particular expertise foodwise, I participate in all of it. And organize the work plan.

One night last summer ago, a gaunt and very anxious young woman emerged tentatively past the tree line, barely visible in the evening light, as we were eating our supper. We invited her in to join us for a meal and then to stay on if she wanted. Which she did. She had sad, sunken eyes and hardly ever spoke, so it took several weeks for us to find out who she was and where she had come from. She had, she finally explained, been aggregated, via her father, into a small group right after the accident, when she was 8. Her pod was mostly adult men. The first years were almost idyllic she said, hard to imagine under the circumstances. Apparently, her father was, like my mother, a genuinely good guide, guard, and spirit. About five years in he, too, died suddenly and things changed utterly. Absent his oversight, the other men in the group began

to harass her, at first playfully, she said, soon more aggressively. Then they victimized her sexually. She was clearly traumatized and constantly on the alert, fearing they may be out looking for her. Her name, she said, was Nina.

To assimilate her into our group, I spent a lot of time with her, introducing her to each of our specialist skills to see which ones she had a gift for. Her foraging skills were, of course, limited due to a lack of experience, so much of our time together in the forest was teaching-related. But there was something about it that was genuinely fun for both of us, more like play than work. My fishing skills are below average, but she was comically inept at it, just couldn't get the coordination right no matter how hard we tried. After a while we would just end up laughing hilariously. And come home empty-handed. But she was a naturally gifted grower, took to that instantly. Everything she planted and cared for grew faster and bigger than we were accustomed to. So, shortly, she became our lead "green thumb."

Lately, I find myself more and more charmed by her, attracted I'd say, but not in the knee-wobbling ways of my 5th grade self, for which I'm grateful. I am of course inexperienced in matters of that sort, which means I am often awkward and confused. This is complicated by the ways in which she was abused, which clearly left her guarded, cautious around men, and with an obvious aversion to any kind of intimacy. I am hesitant for that reason alone to make any advances toward her. I suppose that's for the best. Maybe we can just help each other heal without risking what we have in the inevitable complications of romance. Except for the garden center couple, who seem genuinely fond of one another, happy in everyday normal ways, I have never in my life witnessed a marriage or sexual partnership that was anything other than dysfunctional. Most of them ended in separation or divorce. The ones that didn't should have, if only for mercy's sake.

All of this is to say that a transition has taken place for which I am grateful, my mind having followed my eyes up into the wide, blue, cloud-dappled sky instead of hiding huddled against the long dark night that Hyperion's collapse brought on. I have in fact lost almost all interest in that machine I spent so much time trying to fathom and document, my inner world preoccupied now listening to birds and flowers sing on my way to the bay, and to the melodious duet of laughter that arises any time Nina and I walk together and talk.

Post #6: September, 2206

It has been well over three years since my last post. I am sitting this morning looking out at the "harvest moon," a fitting symbol for what I'm about to write here, the culmination of many years of care-full "cultivation." On the one hand, that intervening time seems to have stretched into centuries, all the fear-riled turmoil induced by the Hyperion crisis a vague and remote memory, almost like it never happened, a "myth" more than "history." On the other hand, it seems like seconds since I reported on my walks listening to all that spring singing. I will try to account for this anomaly, and others as well, in this final post.

I'll begin with an incidental discovery I made not long after my last post. I was going through some boxes among my mother's effects and found a small notebook filled with mysterious calculations I didn't recognize and couldn't decipher. I assumed at first that it was rendered in some sort of code. But I applied myself to it and, after several months, realized it was the next logical phase of the subjective probability mathematics she and her colleagues had developed in advance of designing Hyperion. The original math, pre-Hyperion, was almost entirely space-related, pertinent to the

material world of places, people and things. This new iteration, on the other hand, was time-related, and it was premised on the assumption that time was the consciousness-partner of materiality in the spacetime continuum.

One of the implications of her calculations was that time is variable in much more radical ways than general relativity posits—slowing down when velocity relative to an observer increases toward the speed of light, equalizing again when those relative velocities are near zero, all of which can be measured in traditional ways with precise enough clocks. For example, according to general relativity, a traveler to Mars, moving at half the speed of light will, when she returns to earth, be younger than the cohort she left behind, by dint of having been moving at such high speeds (relative to them) on the journey. My mother's new math took this to a whole other level, positing that time is also variable at the quantum level of consciousness, but with the opposite effect. The holy grail of advanced mathematics for almost two centuries has been the reconciliation of general relativity with quantum mechanics. It's possible that what I saw in that notebook was, if not the solution, a huge step toward it.

The anomaly I point to in my opening paragraph offers one set of figures to demonstrate this conundrum. During the first two years after my mother passed I had the strangest sense that my time and the rest of the world's time were completely out of synch, as if mine had slowed nearly to a stop from their point of view externally and sped up exponentially internally. I would feel as if I had had a year's worth of growth and experience, which I could write about voluminously, only to realize that, relative to the those around me, only a month had passed, sometimes only a week. I used the old 7:1 "dog years" analogy to describe this sensation, which I assumed was entirely subjective. This new math suggested otherwise, that my consciousness was in fact advancing at an astronomical pace

vis-à-vis theirs; and my material body was aging much slower than theirs. Which is to say that in periods of deep crisis, especially grief-related, time does not simply *feel* like it both slows down and speeds up, it actually does! I can recall now a number of comments back then that conveyed surprise at all I was able to accomplish so quickly intellectually and how young I continued to look while I did it.

These past three years that have passed so fleetingly for me are the opposite face of that. If urgency speeds up temporality at the quantum level, making moments feel like months, the way pain does, then normalcy resets the clock to “standard time,” where “growing wiser” and “growing older” are equalized. Long stretches of time pass with very little seeming to change or happen.

Which gets me to the second trove of material I discovered, or more accurately simply noticed for the first time. On the top shelf of my mother’s library, far to the right, was an assortment of books, about half a dozen, that seemed at first sight unrelated to one another, and largely off-topic vis-à-vis her work. I assumed she had set them aside up there for that reason, and I ignored them. One night, looking for new reading material, I took them down. All, I noticed, were written in the late 20th century, just as global warming was “heating up” as a topic, at least among climate scientists and more advanced thinkers, though almost not at all, I know historically, among the power elites, who crafted fervid narratives of denial and foisted them on the general populace to suppress any initiatives to slow or counter the uptick in temperatures that might disrupt their agreed-up, greed-motivated, economic preferences. The results of this were predictably disastrous. As I suggested last time in my dream narrative, some of the “states” in which that denial was most extreme were partially, and in the case of Florida, inundated by rising sea water, literally struck “off the map.”

Initially, I read a bit of each book to see which I'd prefer to start with. They were all so captivating, though, I couldn't decide. So, I ended up reading them all simultaneously, a bit of each every night before I went to bed, in no particular sequence. I'd just pick one up, read 10-15 pages or a chapter, then pick up another, and so on. The effect of this was stunning. I would be reading one and think I was somehow still in the midst of one of the others, sometimes all of the others! At first I believed this to be an illusion created by the fact that they all were concerned with the dire future of the earth right then. The more I read, though, the more I began to feel that, while they had separate visions, they all shared, unknowingly, a common consciousness, which is how prophecy works no matter the historical time or place: The most avant-garde thinkers enter a truth-related state of mind far in advance of their generational cohort, they render it gnominically, and are at best ignored, often persecuted, sometimes killed for their troubles.

The question at the heart of these treatises, in its simplest form, was how and why human civilization could have ended up in such a mess, not just climate-change-wise, but in almost every respect. And each of them traced it back to the same historical Ur-moment: when human culture shifted from hunting-gathering to farming as the preferred mode of sustenance. The former, almost by definition, requires a collective consciousness founded on shared multi-tasking, much like the one I described last time in our little pod, and, as best I can tell, in every other pod that has survived successfully in the aftermath of the accident. In this mode, time is circular rather than linear, keyed to repeating cycles rather than to forward-oriented "progress," to spontaneity, even serendipity, rather than to time-clocks, to intuition as the preferred guide for change rather than to logic, and it presumes bounty rather than scarcity as the base state of the natural world. But, most

importantly it organizes the social unit equitably rather and hierarchically. In other words, most generally, consciousness works with rather than against materiality.

I won't bother to go into each of these books' specific arguments. What they made me see clearly, though, for the first time, was how the many small collectives that were surviving quite nicely now had returned to the type of human culture that was at one with our "animal" origins, was connected so intimately with "nature" that the term itself became as unthinkable as "enlightenment" does when almost everyone experiences it. There was no longer a hard line of demarcation between "I" and "it," consciousness and materiality. Each of these books argued that humans were expressly designed this way by evolution, and that Indigenous cultures based on this synthesis operated quite functionally for many millennia. The sudden introduction of new model during the neolithic period, when patriarchal and hierarchical structures emerged to maximize the "production" of food via large-scale farming—becoming over time the model for every of "means of production" human economies created—overwrote this inner code in the most deleterious ways, all of which were intentionally obfuscated by the powerful elites who benefited most from this new order of things.

What each of these books prophesied was an inevitable collapse of that system, one as "predestined" by the biases of its intrinsic "spins" as Hyperion was. Hyperion, in other words, was located at the spot on the futural timeline where all of these arguments unknowingly intersected. Again, I was stunned, went back to my mother's little notebook to work out the calculations in light of this insight. Over a period of a week or so, I followed the math to its inevitable conclusion, on the last page: " ∞ =Hyperion," the point not where mathematics ceases to function, but where human enterprise based on the

separation of consciousness from materiality ceases to function. “QED! Simple as that,” I could hear her saying.

And that is where I will terminate these posts and end my story. In case you’re curious: Our little community—now expanded to 12, some of our previous “stars” returning after finding “intergalactic space” less than amicable, some new members having wandered in and chosen to stay, as Nina did a few years back—is running smoothly. My relationship with Nina has evolved in the most lovely ways. Since she and I are, by nature, private people, any details about that would not just be impertinent, they would be a violation of trust. So that’s that. On a cosmic level, it is quite clear that, as the old expression goes, “time is of the essence,” in ways I now understand, via my mother’s work, and will do my best to share informally with anyone who happens our way.

I have heard rumors, via itinerant passersby, that something akin to “civilization” is reemerging, on a significant scale in the Global South, as I predicted it might, and on a smaller scale in communities in the Global North where, by now, aggregations in the hundreds, even thousands, are not uncommon, enforcing divisions of labor, and therefore of class, gender and race, much like the ones that characterized the society that created Hyperion. My hope is that our model will end up being the preferred one for communal living, one “spun” by love, light, and truth. One in which humans are not distinct from nature, but “of it,” so “of it” that the term nature itself ceases to have any meaning beyond “it is.” One where consciousness and materiality are so intertwined that those binary terms as well are redundant, have no meaning beyond “to be.” And where the time we spend embodied on earth is not best described as existence, an endless series of separate one-and-dones stitched together into “history,” but as “being,” the fabric that hosts endless iterations of the same vitality. The mathematics is quite clear: “Being” is both now and then, here

and there, inside and outside, is animated by childlike wonder, and is genderless by definition, all expressed by the simple term “wisdom,” as it has always been. Yes, simple as that.

Paul is the author of numerous books of poetry, personal essays, and scholarship available in multiple formats at online booksellers and (for free, in PDF form) at paulkameen.com.

Poetry:

Insta-poems (2023)
slights: my new tiny poems from here not there (2021)
September Threnody (2023)
In the Dark (2016)
Harvest Moon (2016)
Li Po-ems (2016)
Mornings After: Poems 1975-95
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Reading/Writing Outside the Lines (2024)
waking up: reading wisdom texts (2023)
In Dreams . . . (2022)
Living Hidden (2021)
Harvest (2020)
Spring Forward (2019)
The Imagination (2019)
A Mind of Winter (2019)
First, Summer (2018)
Last Spring (2018)
This Fall (2016)

Scholarship:

Re-reading Poets: The Life of the Author (2011)
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