

Chapter Three Lightning in the Darkness

*“He doesn’t know which of us I am these days, but they know one truth.
You must own nothing but yourself. You must make your own life,
live your own life, and die your own death...
or else you will die another’s.”*

*Alfred Bester
Fondly Fahrenheit*

*“The Universe (which others call the Library) is composed of an indefinite,
perhaps infinite number, of hexagonal galleries...The Library is a sphere whose
exact center is any hexagon and whose circumference is unattainable.”*

*Jorge Luis Borges
The Library of Babel*

There is darkness upon the land. To the north spires of orange and blue flames spew forth out of the myriad smokestacks illuminating the vast gray body of water behind them. Funnels of smoke, gray, and black and white, also can be seen rising up into the sky. The landscape stretches out for miles and miles as black as hell – punctuated by street lights obscured by the soot in the air. Humans do not live in a place like this, only Morlocks whose skin has turned gray, mimicking the colors of machines, city streets, old buildings, and cement. I feel like I am crossing into Dante’s *Inferno*, all hope abandoned upon entering into this ominous world of giant factories, old dilapidated warehouses, and gargantuan steel mills, all shrouded in gaseous industrial waste. I am moving along the interstate just south of Lake Michigan, heading toward my new home. Immediately to the west is Chicago – off in the distance – only thirty miles away as the crow flies, but a million miles away with its modern glass skyscrapers, architectural wonders, luxury shops and jazzy restaurants, and its high powered life. There is none of that to be found in this place that I am entering now. My God – what am I doing here?

* * * * *

After graduating, I find it extremely difficult to find an academic job. For starters, I rush through my final year of graduate school, writing a four hundred and fifty page thesis in less than six months and consequently not allowing myself enough time to job search or publish some articles to add to my academic credentials. But Laura thinks I should start making more money. My graduate fellowship has been rather meager, we are broke, and we have a second child, Kristin, who is born in August. Also, we both want to move back east, to leave the Midwest and live closer to “home,” but this narrows my initial job search to the northeast, a tactic that gets me nowhere, except that I waste three or four

valuable months looking within too limited an area and many job possibilities pass me by. And finally, in graduate school I do not specialize in a narrow area of psychology and do not get into experimental research. I stay a generalist, interested in the broad issues of theoretical psychology, intellectual history, and the philosophy of science and mind. I am a Renaissance man living in an era of the study of minutiae. My thesis covers a two-thousand-year period of thinking on perception and is the length of a book. I want to be a scholar and a writer who investigates and thinks about the deep issues of knowledge, reality, the good life, and the human mind, and who wants that?

Yet, literally at the last possible moment, feeling exceedingly desperate and dejected, I serendipitously run into a fellow graduate student while I am back in Minnesota defending my thesis, who tells me about a job offer he has just turned down that he thinks might fit me perfectly. I rush to tell Bob Shaw about the opportunity and Bob immediately calls the chair of the psychology department with the job opening, and convinces the chair over the phone to grant me an interview. In two days I am there going through the interview, and a couple of days later, the chair calls me and offers me the job – an assistant professorship in psychology at a four-year college in northwest Indiana. I take it. Though I want to head back east, I am being drawn back toward the west.

I should know, and perhaps at some level I do, that things are not going to go well.

Before we all move out, I come out alone to quickly find a place to live and, sick of living in apartments, I find a house to rent, very close to the beach on Lake Michigan. I think it is picturesque and romantic. It is a big house but it needs a lot of cleaning up, and in our first week there (after Laura and the kids come out) we find live rounds of ammunition buried under garbage scattered about the rooms of the dwelling and lumps of dried animal dung in several places throughout the house. Moving our refrigerator into the house it gets stuck in the stairway leading into the kitchen. Its massive weight seems to willfully thwart our every effort and we think we are going to have to rip down a wall before, finally, after a couple of hours of pushing and twisting it about, we maneuver it free. We rip up the wooden hand railings in the process. And there are a million other little problems and nuisances that emerge as we try to get organized in the place. The house does not seem open to our presence.

Then one night as I lie on the couch in the living room, the TV all of a sudden just goes on, in synchrony with the whole house lighting up in a sudden flash of bright light. I hear a large crack – like wood shattering – and am totally spooked out. Why would a TV just go on? (We have already been talking about the idea that the house could be haunted.) Within a couple of seconds I realize that the house has been hit by lightning; living so close to Lake Michigan, lightning is especially drawn toward our neighborhood. The lightning came in through our electrical wiring and not only split the wood handrail in the hallway but permanently fused the on/off switch in the TV set, which is why it went on. We decide the lightning is the last straw – a bad omen to say the least – and we move out of the house within a week into a nice clean three-bedroom apartment

in a new complex – at least five miles away from the lake. But I should know . . . call me superstitious . . . I think the house is hexed ... it is more than that.

* * * * *

I don't want to be here at the college in Indiana. I want a faculty position in a more academic location, preferably at an ivy-covered campus in a small New England town where I can devote myself to being a scholar and a writer, where I can spend my time in libraries surrounded by books and in my study, reading Plato, Aristotle, and the classics of Western thought. Instead I am surrounded by and engulfed within the pollution-clogged, industrialized modern Midwest and its suburban outgrowth of apartment complexes, ranch style homes, fast food restaurants, never-ending gas stations on street corners, and strip malls. Yet, my image of the future (though I don't realize it at the time) – the life of the bookish scholar in a rustic setting, reminiscent of Norman Rockwell paintings, is really a vision of the past. But this – I pray - cannot be the image of my future.

Still here I am, nevertheless, in the now, in northwest Indiana and my primary responsibility at the college is not scholarship and writing but teaching. In the coming years I teach almost every course in the undergraduate psychology curriculum, from introductory psychology to perception, learning, cognition, motivation and emotion; the history of psychology; and contemporary theories in psychology, as well as some unusual courses like psychology and science fiction and the philosophy of science.

In spite of my discontent, as usual I rise to the challenge and decide I am going to extensively research every topic I teach and ensure that my students receive a thorough grounding in the subject matter of any course they take with me. I take Feyerabend's approach and make sure I describe the main issues and competing theories and viewpoints in each topic. I am a pluralist as opposed to a dogmatist. I also decide to adopt Turvey's style of teaching, coming to class with energy, enthusiasm, and the conviction that I can explain the principles of psychology to students and that they will understand it all and enjoy it.

It is strange that up to this point in time I never envision myself much as a teacher. Yet, I apply myself and go at it and I am rewarded – a very positive and uplifting surprise, in fact, for enduring the grayness and industrial ambience of my surroundings. I quickly find that I love to teach (once I get over the anxiety of speaking in front of people). I very much enjoy my students and take great pleasure in engaging their minds. Within a year or two, I become an excellent teacher – articulate, clear, animated, highly organized, personable, and above all else, extremely stimulating. I can get people thinking and talking and discussing and debating – I get their minds to come alive. My student evaluations are consistently very good, if not superlative.

Teaching is the candle – the light – that helps to wipe out the feeling of bleakness that engulfs me. It pushes it back. I could be anywhere. It doesn't matter when I dive into the world of ideas with my students.

As I evolve as a teacher, it hits me that teaching is like conducting an orchestra in the performance of a symphony. All the pieces have to come

together. One has to keep in one's mind the whole and weave in each component part in a logical and intuitive way, building to a climax, a finale, that synthesizes all the elements into a great crescendo of insight and understanding. A class period is a Gestalt – an idea is a whole of many coordinated parts.

Further, one has to make sure that the orchestra is engaged. The students have to be provoked and challenged into performing, into opening their minds and voicing their views. They have to be astonished – they have to sing - to experience enlightenment at times.

Teaching is a form of intellectual and personal entertainment. Teaching is like music: the souls of both the teacher and the students should be elevated and inspired by the experience.

Hence, good teaching is a passion, as much a Romantic expression as an Apollonian one. The Apollonian though is not to be minimized. Without my concerns for analytic detail, order and coherence, abstraction and integration, logic and truth, and intellectual thoroughness, the Romantic would not be able to flower. It would be a superficial performance, shallow and filled with fluff. The Apollonian gives the Romantic substance and depth; the Romantic gives the Apollonian life.

Teaching and learning is an interpersonal, interactive experience weaving together the intellect and the passions.

As a consequence of my ongoing teaching and interaction with students, instead of realizing my dream of a solitary existence, lost in my mind and the universe of abstract ideas, I become much more social and sociable, drawing other people into my personal and intellectual space – into the worlds of history, psychology, philosophy, and science - and it is exhilarating. I am always talking with students in class, debating and discussing things with them. I talk to them outside the classroom as well. I bring them into my world and they open up and share their ideas, their hopes, and their lives with me. Being around them I feel a sense of energy well up in me, a new dimension to my personality, a feeling of having value and significance. I get to know all these new people, Linda, Bridget, Joy, Bill, Terry, Pat, Greg, and hundreds and hundreds of others. It is an emotional and spiritual high.

I find another way to experience flow, in interaction with others, and I can provoke flow in many of the students, the intellectual flow of thinking about ideas, about the nature of the human mind and human personality, about the history of thought, and the wonders of reality. I always approach students with the highest expectations that they can understand whatever ideas, however difficult, I throw at them. I teach them Gibson – I teach them Feyerabend, Plato, and Aristotle. I do not sell them short. I do not talk down to them. I ask a lot from them and they frequently deliver. They love it and we get into it.

Part of the life of the enlightened mind is exploring with others the meaning and nature of things. It is in Indiana, of all places, in this dark, depressing, culturally impoverished, and sooty world, that I first learn to lead others on the path to wisdom and enlightenment. It is in Indiana that I learn to teach and share my mind with others. It is the *Yin* and *Yang* of things.

As for my own intellectual and scholarly development, it is through teaching that I much more deeply learn the subject matter of my disciplines, specifically psychology, philosophy, science, and intellectual history. When you have to explain something to other people, it really tests and challenges your understanding. You get to listen to your own mind, how well oiled it is and how well the different parts work together – out loud. Often you surprise yourself with what comes out of your mouth, where your mind goes as you start to think out loud. How do I know what I think until I hear what I have to say? Bottom line: Teaching is the best way to learn and the best way to practice and strengthen your thinking, and in Indiana I really learn and internalize what I have been studying for the previous eight years.

I feel responsible for communicating to students the clearest, most comprehensive and balanced, and most up-to-date and well organized overview of the material. In my mind this is the core of education. This is the path to enlightenment for them. I want them to understand, to know, to be aware, and to have a broad and balanced perspective on things. I am continually pushed in the direction of knowing the subject matter better and better to make sure they get it better and better. Also, I am driven by the conviction that there is a way to explain any idea, no matter how abstract or difficult it is, to any reasonably intelligent mind assuming the person will listen, ask questions, and discuss the idea with you. And I am my own worst critic, continually assessing myself after each class regarding how well I come across, how well the students react, and what I can do to improve the educational experience.

I like my students, interact with them as people, and want them to succeed. I want them to “see the light.” I am always watching them and observing how interested or attentive they appear. One day in one of my classes a student stands up in the back row and exclaims “That’s it! I understand.” He picks up his books, leaves the room, and I never see him again. What did I say to him, I ask? I have no idea. But there is something that triggers the flash – the insight – the moment of enlightenment in him and that is that. He is off. I may not be turning into the solitary scholar and writer I envisioned, but I am becoming more knowledgeable, more enlightened, more wise, yet it is in the context of interacting with people. All these higher qualities of mind and character, I come to realize, require a social arena in which to really blossom and be refined. As Gibson would say, we are ecological beings, and knowledge is realized in an ecological and interpersonal setting.

But something else is going on. If I am opening up in one arena of my life, I am closing up and retreating in another.

* * * * *

It is 4:00 or 5:00 in the morning. The house is still except for the classical music playing on the radio, but the music is very low. I don’t want to wake anyone up. Almost every night I do this, stay up almost till dawn and read stories and novels in my study. I feel guilty doing this, for I think I should be trying to write articles for publication. Yet except for preparing for the classes I teach, I’m

not creating much of anything new. I can't seem to find the desire to do so. This has been going on almost since I first arrived in Indiana. For the last three years, I have been devouring science fiction, sometimes reading a novel a day, often during the time when everyone in the household is asleep - my only company the music in the background and the eerie ambience of that time of the deep night when ghosts from other dimensions and monsters from the unconscious wander about.

I ask myself why I am doing this. As a new college professor I should be doing research and writing in my discipline. My thesis has sat there for the last three years, when, with some work, it could be published as a book. Am I trying to sabotage my career? Good teaching isn't enough; you need to write and publish. I know that if I want to find a better academic position back east, then I need to do this. And isn't that my dream anyway, to read scholarly works and write scholarly books? Am I being irresponsible for some unconscious reason that isn't clear to me? Is something pulling me in a different direction?

Frequently, I ignore the reality around me. Early in the evenings I can hear Laura and the kids. They do things: watch TV, talk, play games. But I am not there.

I am in the future. I am off in outer space. I am in another dimension. I am wandering the desolate terrain of Mars, on an odyssey, accompanied by a friendly Martian named "Tweel." I am on Jupiter, a technologically and biologically enhanced human called Joe, terrifyingly powerful, amazingly strong, who has finally found his true self after a lifetime of being a cripple on the earth. Instead of sitting stranded in Indiana, I have left it. Instead of living in 1976, I have jumped into a time machine and traveled into strange and different futures. I am Frost, from Roger Zelazny's "For a Breath I Tarry," a super-computer in the far far future who rules the northern hemisphere of the earth, who cannot feel, but who is searching for sensation and for love. I am one with aliens, strange tiny aquatic aliens, like those in "Surface Tension" by James Blish, who are trying to escape from the mud puddle in which they live and see what lies beyond. I am like the children in "Mimsy Were the Borogroves" who have learned how to construct a machine that is a portal into another time and another dimension. I watch the evolution of humanity millions of years into the future in Olaf Stapledon's *The First and Last Men*. I cry over the grand future saga of humankind, over the great progress and adventure and evolution, and finally the curtain ringing down on the "music that was man." I travel with a crew of humans and aliens to *Ringworld*, a massive circular structure ten thousand miles wide and a hundred million miles in circumference, surrounding a distant sun. We wonder who built such an immense thing and then abandoned it. I am back on earth, in the present, but the Nazis have won World War II, and there is *The Man in the High Castle* who in the novel writes a novel in which he argues that the Allies won World War II. It is one mind-boggling trip after another.

The first science fiction novel I read in Indiana that triggers the escape and passage into this multiverse of possibilities is Clifford Simak's *City*. It is a story about a future in which humanity has disappeared. All that is left are robots and intelligent animals that somehow have learned to think and to speak. The saga is

told around a campfire late at night by intelligent dogs who speculate on man and whether man ever really existed in the past. (What was often evaporates into dreams, into obscurity, into ambiguity.) The story chronicles the abandonment of cities, the coming of robots, the invasion of giant ants from another dimension, and the escape of humanity to Jupiter and beyond. It is very touching. I don't want it to end. I immediately have to go out and buy another science fiction story to read - and another and another.

This has happened to me before, with classical music: total immersion, a sense of losing control, a sense of finding a whole new unexplored universe. This has happened before: a Dionysian or Romantic escape from the Apollonian. Except this time, it is interfering with what I am "supposed to be doing." I can't seem to stomach the abstractions and theories that I studied the last few years as I wrote my thesis. I need stories, drama, color, and sound and fury. I need personification, something different. I can't seem to study the past. I am searching for the future.

What else am I supposed to be doing that I am avoiding?

There is a story about a mad android and his owner, one of whom goes crazy whenever the temperature gets too warm. It is not clear which one of them is crazy in the story. Identities have become confused. Either the man or the android commits murders when the temperature gets too high. The story, written by Alfred Bester, is called "Fondly Fahrenheit." It is a story about the meaning of personal identity, about what happens when identities get confused, when there is no longer any sense of "me" versus the other. Bester also wrote the book *The Demolished Man* – something else I read - the first novel to win the Hugo award for best science fiction novel of the year. It is a story about a future in which people have developed telepathic abilities, where we can read each others' minds. In this transparent and highly paranoid future a telepathic criminal must try to hide his thoughts, emotions, perceptions, and whereabouts from the police who are telepathic as well and who are trying to track him down, to corner his mind and invade it. It is a story of good and evil, of cat and mouse, of cops and robbers, taking place in a meta-space of naked minds. (Imagine how it would feel if everyone could read everyone else's minds.)

Science fiction, in fact, gets into your deep consciousness, gets into your head. It explores the possibilities of self-identity, mental realities, and madness and sanity. It goes after your sense of reality and unsettles it. You move into the intellects of aliens, into the consciousness of highly evolved or transcendent humans, of robots and androids, and even of God. You journey to *Solaris* where the whole planet is conscious – alive – a single mind that communicates through sending dreams into your unconscious. In David Gerrold's *The Man Who Folded Himself* you time travel, switch your genders along the way, and become your spouse, your mother, your father, your daughter, and your son. Your consciousness forms an eternal ring, with no beginning and no end. Your head spins. As the collective intelligence of the entire future universe, in the great culminating act of cosmic evolution, you search out the mind of the Creator, and you find what you are looking for. You gaze into the mind of God in Olaf Stapledon's *Star Maker* and are humbled, bedazzled, and blown away. You

travel out so far in time and so far out in space that you encounter Spinoza's God – the mind of everything – and God turns out to be a child, whose play is the creation of multiple, unending universes.

Sitting there late at night, alone, cut off from the immediate physical world, yet filled with fantastical images and ideas – in the ultimate modern day juiced-up and teched-up version of the Platonic realm, I frequently feel strange, as if I am looking at myself from the outside and see someone different than I expect to see, than I used to see. How can I not feel different, be different, since I am saturating my intellect and my imagination with so many alternative realities? We are beings-in-the-world and I am a being in a world, in a world of time travel, outer space, other dimensions, interpenetrating minds, and alien beings and alien worlds. My sense of reality is being stretched in a million different directions.

My mind feels very clear though. Once again, I am passing through a period of enlightenment, of vistas opening up, of consciousness being expanded in new directions. And the world around me, of Laura and the kids, of Indiana, of my presumed future in New England, at times, seems totally unreal.

Yes, I am looking for something else, something beyond the epistemologies and philosophies I studied in grad school. What is going on is not entirely Romantic in nature – it is not entirely an escape from the abstract into personalization and drama; it is a metaphysical – an ontological - trip as well. And it is also a searching for something else beyond the world I presently inhabit, here in Indiana, in this downstairs study cocooned away.

Not that I haven't thought of it before, but perhaps I don't want the white picket fence in the small college town. Perhaps there are other things I don't want. Perhaps what I want is to float above the rings of Saturn and sing in resonance to the "harmony of the spheres." Perhaps I want to jump in a time machine and find the future.

* * * * *

Every semester, including summers, I teach introductory psychology in a big lecture hall which holds around one hundred and fifty people. I teach from up on a stage but I move around across the stage and reach out to the students. I don't use a microphone – I learn to throw my voice to the back of the room. Behind me I have a blackboard approximately thirty feet in length. Every class I fill up the board with lists, diagrams, pictures, and terms. I connect the whole array with arrows, circles, and circles within circles, in essence creating a "mind map" of the topics discussed in a particular class. The students end up seeing the big picture of ideas, to be imprinted on their brains. I make sure I include as much imagery as I can; I am always asking if there is a way to create a diagram or visualization of an idea. I want the students to see the "Gestalt" and not simply hear a sequence of concepts. As I pace back and forth, turning my attention from my notes, to the blackboard, and then the students, I draw the class into the creation and discussion of the vision emerging before their eyes.

In introductory psychology, from some time early on, I present to students the holistic message that all of the basic psychological dimensions are interconnected and interactive. We have minds possessing consciousness but we exist within an environment – of forms and meanings and affordances - and we are interactive with that world. We actively and selectively perceive and we proactively behave – we manipulate and impact the environment as a consequence of our perceptions, thoughts, emotions, motives, and general personality. Perception impacts thought and emotion, but thought and emotion impact perception; thought, emotion, and motivation all churn around in our head, intertwine, and affect each other. Also, humans are creative beings; though in many ways creatures of habit, we also demonstrate creativity in almost everything we think and do. Though we are influenced by our genetic inheritance and shaped by learning and the environment as we grow and mature, we possess an autonomous capacity. Our minds creatively orchestrate behavior; we creatively orchestrate the content of consciousness and the direction of our lives. Because I think holistically and interactively I can usually demonstrate some degree of validity in all the basic theories in psychology. There is truth in Freud, Jung, Skinner and the behaviorists, Rogers, Gibson, the existentialists, the cognitive psychologists, and the brain theorists and experimentalists. But I also point out where given theories are lacking. For example, the behaviorist approach is too limiting; the cognitive psychologists are right: you can't explain behavior simply in terms of environmental effects and learned habits; the mind shapes and influences everything.

One of my favorite courses is the history of psychology. My classes are much smaller than intro psychology, but the students are more advanced and the classes more interactive. I trace the history of psychology from the ancient Greeks, including Plato and Aristotle, through Descartes and all the other Enlightenment philosophers, to the beginnings of experimental research, psychophysics, and studies of the brain in the nineteenth century, and into the study and analysis of consciousness early in the twentieth century. Psychology begins in philosophy and as it matures is influenced by advances in science, including Darwin's theory of evolution and even ideas from physics and chemistry. As I learn more and more history (in teaching it) I increasingly see how ideas today frequently begin somewhere in the past – are anticipated in ancient or early modern thinkers. History is a cumulative flow and development of insights and discoveries – I had shown this in my study of Gibson. Though there is creativity and novelty, it builds on the past. Aristotle anticipates the Gestalt psychologists, the functional psychologists, and Gibson in numerous ways. There are scientific revolutions, indeed, as Kuhn argues, but revolutionaries take pieces of the past and then put them together in new ways.

I teach a course in cognition and language and spend a good deal of time focusing on creativity. I first devour and then assign Arthur Koestler's *The Act of Creation* – one of the most impressive, learned, and encyclopedic books I have ever read. I find Koestler's description of how Johannes Kepler developed the three laws of planetary motion extremely fascinating. Kepler conceptualized the solar system as the Holy Trinity: the sun was the Father; the earth (and other

planets) represented the Son; and the force (of love) holding together the Son and the Father- that is, the Holy Spirit – was gravity. It was Kepler who first postulated gravity. For Kepler, gravity was astronomical love. Kepler ingeniously applied a theological metaphor to astronomy and in so doing figured out the how and the why of planetary revolution around the sun. As Koestler argues, Kepler took a familiar idea from one domain and applied it to another domain. He saw a connection between two apparently unrelated areas. A new Gestalt – a new whole – emerged.

I also discuss the new studies on split brains where the main connection – the corpus callosum - between the right and left hemispheres of the cerebral cortex is severed as a surgical procedure for reducing the severity of epileptic seizures in some neurological patients. Not only does this procedure seem to produce individuals that possess two relatively distinct minds or spheres of consciousness, it also seems that each of these two minds has relatively distinct capacities. The left hemispheric mind appears logical, linguistic, analytical, and linear; the right hemispheric mind appears more intuitive, visual, holistic, and creative. The left brain thinks in words; the right brain thinks in images – so the emerging popular generalization goes. The two sides complement each other in a normally functioning brain where the corpus callosum is intact, but people can be either right or left brain dominant: some people are more orderly, linear and logical and some more intuitive, visual, and creative. I decide that I am too left brain dominant (my Apollonian side), so through the years I teach in Indiana, I work on my weak side. I push myself to visualize everything – to think in pictures, to cultivate my creativity more.

The department chair also allows me to create new courses. I create a course on major themes in twentieth-century psychology. I create a course on the philosophy of science which I offer through the philosophy department. But the most unusual course I create is psychology and science fiction. Surprisingly there are other psychology professors around the country experimenting with this course and there are a couple of anthologies of readings in the area. Given my renewed passion in science fiction the last few years, my mind has been churning and percolating with themes and concepts from the genre, and it occurs to me that one can find plenty of stories relevant to each of the main areas of psychology. Instead of reading a non-fiction psychology textbook, students can read fictional stories – crazy, imaginative, mind-expanding, way out stories that bring new angles and perspectives to the main topics of psychology. Instead of abstractions and theories and experiments, the students encounter concrete characters placed in highly unusual situations. If the characters are also bizarre, so much the better.

I write to science fiction writers around the country and tell them about my idea of combining science fiction with psychology. Some write back, including Clifford Simak and Roger Zelazny. I go to a psychology conference in Minneapolis in 1976 where, coincidentally, Clifford Simak lives and he agrees to have lunch with me while I am there. Simak, the author of *City* - probably my most loved of all science fiction novels – has lunch with me. What a trip. He is a gentle and kind man, quiet, pleasant, and very receptive to my ideas. It strikes

me that here is someone whose imaginative capacities are immense but who, in person, is totally unassuming and very down to earth. Creativity is not all bells and whistles.

One of the stories I use in the course is “Love is the Plan, the Plan is Death.” The story, only written and published a few years before, is by James Tiptree, Jr. I consider it an excellent vehicle for understanding the concepts of instinct, love, emotion, and motivation. In fact, it is a love story between two aliens, spider-like creatures who live in a jungle-like world. The male, Moggadeet, is significantly bigger than the female, Leelyloo, and he both seduces and is seduced (a reciprocity) by her. After their wild, rambunctious, and fiery copulation, while Moggadeet sleeps, Leelyloo spins a web around him, entrapping him and eventually feeding him to their children. The story is powerful – graphic – visceral – almost pornographic – and filled with psychological and behavioral themes. I eventually give a presentation on the story at another psychology convention. As I carefully think through the story, it strikes me that Tiptree knows an awful lot about psychology.

And one may ask, as I and many others do, who is James Tiptree, Jr.?

During the late 60s, a new writer emerged on the science fiction scene. Beginning with such provocatively titled short stories as “The Girl Who Was Plugged In,” “Please Don’t Play with the Time Machine,” and “Her Smoke Rose up Forever,” this new writer quickly achieved great popularity and acclaim. Yet, no one had ever met this new writer. All correspondence went to a P.O. Box in the Washington D.C. metro area. Some speculated that this new writer worked for the CIA or the FBI, and for security reasons didn’t want his identity divulged. This new writer was James Tiptree, Jr.

One thing seemed clear from the style and content and gutsy power of the writing; according to one famous science fiction writer, Tiptree was a man. Then in 1973, Tiptree’s story, “The Women Men Don’t See,” was nominated for the best science fiction novella of the year and Tiptree wrote the nominating committee declining the nomination. But, why?

Sometime later, Tiptree came out into the open and announced that James Tiptree, Jr. was actually a semi-retired psychologist, a gray-haired sixty-one year old woman, Alice Sheldon, Ph.D. Her story, “The Women Men Don’t See” was nominated for the best science fiction novella (at least in part) because it seemed to demonstrate such a clear understanding and empathy for female psychology though it was written by a man. But then Tiptree was no man, so she declined the nomination.

Tiptree would write later that she had taken her pseudonym from “Tiptree Preserves” in Essex England, the source of Tiptree jams and marmalades. A bit of trivia I will keep in my mind.

When I hear about Tiptree’s true identity I find the whole story so amazing -- this older woman who has fooled everybody; this woman who comes off appearing like some James Bond type character – that I track down Alice Sheldon’s home address. She lives outside of Washington D.C. in McLean, Virginia. I attend a psychology conference there, also in 1976, and decide to take a taxi to her house. When I actually find her house and knock on the door

(unannounced), a tall young gentleman answers the door and tells me she is away in Mexico or someplace. I am disappointed but I don't give up. I write to her, telling her what a fan I am of her writing and how exhilarated I felt when I learned that she was a woman. She writes back – a very nice letter typed in blue ink – sharp, funny, intelligent in tone – a really great mind at work that shows through even in a friendly, conversational letter. Tears come into my eyes when I read it. She signs the letter in the dual identity “Tip/Elli” that she says lives within her. I save the letter; I will always save the letter.

Around the same time she writes a story titled “The Psychologist Who Wouldn't Do Awful Things to Rats” which, if she had maintained her secrecy, would have been a dead giveaway that she was a graduate-level educated psychologist (at the very least).

Unbeknownst to me, a few years later, Alice Sheldon will write a suicide note that she will secretly save for eight years before committing the act.

Tiptree – Alice Sheldon - what a soul.

* * * * *

At times I try to write works of academic scholarship. I write a sixty page article on Bishop Berkeley's theory of perception, but I can't find a publisher. I don't look very hard though. I write a paper on Descartes but it sits on my desk. I put together a presentation on Leonard Troland, the co-inventor of Technicolor, a psychologist who strongly influenced Gibson. I give the talk at the American Psychological Association convention but I am bored.

I also go out and buy forty or fifty pounds of modeling clay and start to sculpture a huge and colorful terrain filled with model dinosaurs. I spend hours and hours making trees, hills, lakes, hadrosaurs, sauropods, ceratopsians, and carnivores. I am very good at making clay dinosaurs – the best there is. I have won awards for it as a young kid. Instead of working on my book on Gibson, I am into the grace and beauty of the Brontosaurus. It is amazing how well I can sculpture a Stegosaurus in mortal combat with an Allosaurus. For some reason I find more enjoyment and sense of accomplishment in this than in writing psychology papers.

* * * * *

As I have said, Laura and I never argue. There is peace in our household – on the surface. Instead I argue with my students in class. My students go with me into discussions of philosophy, psychology, and even science fiction. They journey into the past of the ancient Greeks and the future of cosmic civilizations. They are with me. They reinforce me, as I reinforce them. I feel this sense of mental camaraderie, something I feel is missing with Laura, and Laura knows it.

Still I see Laura as ethically superior to me. Whereas she seems more giving, I seem more self-centered. Laura reinforces this; perhaps the message originally came from her. She is more committed to the marriage, to the ideals of a solid relationship and partnership, to the values of a family, to the raising of

children. I frequently find myself ambivalent about the whole thing. Laura knows this. I have talked to her about this but I struggle, trying to be honest on one hand and, at the same time, somehow trying to work through it. At times I think I'm getting better. Many times I tell her that I love her. I see her as kind and giving. I feel this appreciation toward her. I think and tell her that she is too good for me.

But Laura never comes into the study with me. Laura never comes to watch me teach. Laura never talks about ideas, never talks about history or philosophy with me. Laura never reads any books.

Somewhere along the way, emerging slowly over many years but growing stronger and stronger, she sends me the message that the life of the intellect is flawed. It is an escape from "reality." It is deficient when it comes to everyday, practical wisdom. Though I am "book smart" I am failing at life. I am not "realistic." From Laura's perspective, I don't spend enough time with our children. I don't sufficiently attend to their needs. I stay in bed too late in the morning. I don't get into family functions and events. I am odd – peculiar. I am too strange and aloof.

This message gets into my brain. She rejects what I love.

There are, though, a number of things we share but even here there is a problem. We go shopping together. We watch TV together. We go to restaurants and to the movies together. We attend social functions together. We play cards with our friends together. We eat together. We make love together. We sleep together. We talk about and plan out concrete practical events (buying cars, fixing things in the house, taking trips, etc.). In these areas we are partners, companions, and friends. But these are all things at the bottom of Maslow's hierarchy of needs (security and bodily pleasures). And, of course, is that enough?

Although by some standards we are a success – we have a house and two healthy children; I have job security and a solid profession and career; and Laura is an excellent mother and housewife – and though in essence our roles complement each other, these standards of domestic success derive from the stereotypical middle class family image of the 50s and early 60s, an image which is flawed. Our division of labor and interests generates a separation of the mental spaces in which each of us lives.

In the final analysis, though we live in the same house, eat at the same dinner table, and share the same bed, in many ways, we inhabit two different universes. One thing Laura and I do agree on, though, is that we both want to go back east, me to find my ideal college position, Laura to be close to her family and old friends. At least that's what we keep saying to each other.

And then, in the third year in Indiana, the opportunity presents itself, the thing we presumably have been waiting for. There is an ideal faculty opening at a university in New England in the history of psychology, which is one of my main areas of expertise and interest. It is a position for a scholar and a teacher. I apply for the opening with great hopes of landing it. I do a great deal of work in answering all the in-depth questions included in the application. I think that my answers are very good. I go to the school to speak in person with the head of the

search committee. I have read his book on the history of psychology; we have a great conversation.

But I don't get the offer. I am second on the list and candidate number one takes the job and that is that. That really is that. This is not the door into the future.

* * * * *

Instead, I am lost in a story I recently read "The Library of Babel." I am writing a story provoked by it, a time travel adventure about leaving "The Library of Babel." There is a woman in my story and the woman has bright red hair. She is tempting me to abandon everything and chase after her.

Written by the great Argentine fantasist, Jorge Luis Borges, "The Library of Babel" is the most imaginative, thought-provoking short story I have ever read. More metaphysical and allegorical than, strictly speaking, science fiction, Borges' tale takes place in a vast library that extends indeterminately in every direction without any discoverable end. The fictional inhabitants of the library, with no collective memory of its creation, believe that the library is eternal. They also believe that the library is the entire universe, infinite or boundless in both space and time. Rooms upon rooms, extending upwards and downwards, forward and back, and to the right and the left, each room in the library contains shelves filled with rows and rows of books. Given certain constraints placed on the size of the books in the library ("...each book contains four hundred ten pages; each page, forty lines; each line, approximately eighty black letters"), Borges imagines that all possible sequences of letters and spaces are contained in the seemingly endless volumes in the library.

Consequently, most of the books in the library appear to be random gibberish with every possible succession not only of letters, but words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs, and chapters. For example, in the library is a book that simply repeats "The cat sat on the mat" over and over again for four hundred ten pages, and another book that repeats "The mat sat on the cat" for four hundred ten pages, etc., etc. etc. Another book simply repeats "cat," another "mat," another "Shakespeare," another "Borges." Another book alternates between "Shakespeare" and "cat" and another book alternates between "dirigible" and "submarine" and so forth. Another book repeats this paragraph (that I am writing right now) over and over again; another repeats it backwards; another leaves out just the articles and another just the nouns. Every permutation, every combination, is in some volume in the library.

But because of this totally unconstrained vastness of possibilities, somewhere in the library must be all the exact works of Shakespeare, Dickens, Plato, and Aristotle as well as all small, medium, and significant variations of their works. Every edition of *The New York Times*, of *The National Geographic*, and of *Cosmopolitan*, and every Doctor Seuss book are also all in the library. Again, since every possible book is in the library, the definitive answer to the meaning and purpose of the library, and of the entire universe itself, as well as all false answers, are contained in books somewhere in the library. (This book and all

variations on it must also exist in the library.) The library contains all the words that Jesus said that are not recorded in the Bible, and all the words he will say at the Second Coming, whether he comes or not. Undoubtedly in a very large set of volumes, the library contains the entire description, down to the minutest detail, of the future history of our universe (and every other one besides). Hell – the library of Babel contains “The Library of Babel” and all possible versions of it. The library swallows Google, as if it were nothing more than a morsel, a speck, a droplet of food for the mind. If that doesn’t make your head spin nothing will.

The library contains every book that will ever be written and every book that will not.

The inhabitants of the library have spent their lives in search of the book that explains it all but since there are so many books, most of which make no sense, the chances of finding the book border on the infinitesimal. The library is a boundless sea of chaos with islands of order spread about, at vast distances from each other, with no discernable (or every discernable) pattern to their distribution. The library is the universe of galaxies spread across the white noise of the background radiation of creation.

And of course one could ask, if someone did find the book – the book that explained “life, the universe, and everything” - how would they know it, since there are an indeterminately large number of books in the library giving false explanations of the library? The situation is maddening.

And all of this futility is recorded somewhere in the library as well, along with a recounting of the day when someone actually discovers the “true” book and knows it and knows why they know it. But how could this be? Yet it must be. What is impossible, as well as what is possible, is written somewhere in the library.

Every thought that Spinoza’s God could have is somewhere in the library. Every thought the Devil could have is there as well.

When I think through the Library of Babel, an infinite process without end, as the Beatles would say, “It blows my mind.” I become lost in a universe of absolute disorientation. It is frightening once you grasp the idea. I imagine I am looking into the face of God. This is enlightenment, the opening of consciousness, but so powerful – so vast – my mind goes reeling every which way in its endless possibilities and implications. But, as I said above, I also, at some point, start thinking about escaping from it.

* * * * *

After I read “The Library of Babel” on one of those nights, alone, sitting in the middle of the cosmos, lost in Indiana, I can’t stop thinking about it afterwards. I talk about it with my students. I assign it as a reading in my course on psychology and science fiction. A million associations are triggered off by the story and its image. I see the library as a metaphor on life: searching for meaning and the right answers to things amidst a vast sea of meaningless gibberish, as well as false, misleading, or destructive answers.

Or perhaps, I think, the answer to things can be found in any book, as long as one understands how to read it, has the correct theory or language to interpret it, as Feyerabend would say. (Or to complicate matters further, the inhabitants of the library speculate that perhaps the books are written in some divine or esoteric code, or that the meaning of each symbol is contextually determined by the symbols surrounding it.)

I calculate the number of books in the library, assuming every book is unique and all possible books are present. The number roughly is twenty-six (the number of distinct symbols in the books and the one space marker) multiplied by itself (to the power of) one million three hundred and twelve thousand (the number of spaces to be filled by the twenty five symbols and space marker within each book) – which comes out to a number of approximately one million eight hundred thousand digits. But these calculations already exist in the library. (A trillion is a one followed by only twelve zeros (digits) – a google is a one followed by a mere hundred zeros (digits) – this number, “Babel”, is vast, deep, expansive, immense – a journey to all the galaxies and stars, across the entirety of space and time in the universe, and into the minute intricacies of every atom in the cosmos.)

I keep ruminating on the point that everything I have written or ever will write is already somewhere in the library. It is as if all possible futures are already foretold in the library. I compare the library with Spinoza’s God: everything is set, defined, determined, and articulated. (But of course Spinoza wouldn’t have allowed for all the chaos in the Library.) Still everyone must be trapped in the library - just as we are in Spinoza’s God - and we just don’t know it. (This is *The Matrix* all over again.) All our lives are written there, seen through “the eyes of eternity.” I ask myself if there is any conceivable way out of the library. The inhabitants can’t find a way out, but it hits me that somewhere in the library there exists a book that provides directions for getting out of the library. It has to be there. Everything has to be there.

Perhaps “The Library of Babel” is like a Buddhist *koan*: contemplating it eventually burns out the intellect and reasoning, producing enlightenment, or it drives you mad – which is maybe the same thing.

Sitting in my study I begin to think that I live in a kind of “Library of Babel,” surrounded by books, each book providing an answer to life or some facet of the universe. Somewhere in all the books is every possible answer. But also, many of my books are probably gibberish, confused, or misleading. What’s more, although there is this great vastness to the topics and realms described and encompassed in the books in the library, it seems that there is something missing – something missing in the idea of a library. I can sense it but can’t say it – can’t wrap my mind around it. I feel that I am trapped in my own library and that there is something outside of it.

So I begin to write, to envision a story. It is a time travel story about a man who lives in a library. The man is a scholar, an Apollonian mind, a being of reason and order. His goal in life is to understand everything, to integrate the vast wealth of knowledge – of science and philosophy - and put it down on paper. He will see into the mind of God. He will write the book. But this is somehow not

enough he realizes; the intellect can not capture all of existence. (So I think. So I have been told). Existence can not be frozen into words. (I am thinking that Spinoza is wrong – but how?)

Hence, I imagine a woman whom I call “Harmony,” coming into the library, invading the ordered space of his world. Harmony is a being of emotionality – fiery red hair, quintessentially erotic, a being of fluidity and fickleness – an expression and personification of the chaos of time. Her name is ironical and yet right on the mark for she will bring balance into the excessive imbalance of order, intellect, and reason. Plato is wrong: reason did not create harmony; ultimate harmony requires chaos. What a strange idea!

The woman tempts the man, leading the man out of the library, and he chases her through time. She will not stand still for him though. She is time in a metaphorical sense. On every occasion when he finds her she breaks free and runs away again. She can not be frozen or captured. He will learn about love, though, through this endless chase (such a depressing image of love indeed) and learn that eternal stability can not encompass time.

The vision is highly dichotomous, dualistic and stereotypical: I envision the man as standing for reason and order and the woman standing for emotionality and chaos. This is a mistake.

To think Jungian, perhaps the story represents my search for the “anima” (the female side) in me. I have not found it – yet.

For the Greeks, wisdom (“Sophia”) is a woman. Perhaps I am looking for wisdom, having become enlightened?

Perhaps I am ready to dive into the rabbit hole. Only “fools rush in.” Yet to be wise one must first be a fool.

Whatever the case, I have this unnerving feeling that the story is a premonition.

It is sometime around the late spring/early summer of 1976. I am thinking, off and on – a crazy thought indeed – that I want to become a science fiction writer. I am thinking that science fiction gets at things better than abstract philosophy or psychology. Life is a story, not a theory. Life should be fantastical, imaginative, and filled with lightning and chaos, not a home in the suburbs or a walk among the eternal heavenly forms of Plato.

* * * * *

“Don’t wish for your heart’s desire, you just might get it.”

Confucius

*“Now I have the chance to be a decent human being,
for I am standing eye to eye with death.”*

Ludwig Wittgenstein

This is what I'm thinking at 11:00 p.m. on the day after Christmas, 1976. What I'm thinking is I need to find myself, perhaps to create myself. Find – create – whatever the case may be - I feel that my identity got away from me, somewhere, somehow. I don't feel a sense of an autonomous self within my conscious mind. I feel I have been lost in others. I feel that everything I have done has been in response to others, in relationship to them and their expectations. This is what is going through my mind. What an odd thought. Perhaps there was never a real sense of who I was, and I am only now realizing it. What on God's earth has happened to me?

I have to figure all of this out – on the road – by myself – through the night.

I have just separated from Laura. It has been around four months. We had been together for the last twelve years. My whole adult life I had been with her. Although immersed in my books and then in teaching, I realize now that it was hard for me to feel a distinct sense of self, especially around her. It was Tom and Laura for so long. I was lost in Laura and now I have been set adrift.

This comes as a great existential shock to me, now that I am alone, now that I can say it to myself out loud with no one around to judge me. The ground which I never noticed and held me down under the pull of its gravity has been removed. Instead of flying like a bird (my fantasy), I am lost in space, spinning head over heels with no sense of up and down.

Perhaps the marriage was simply the final stage of my adolescence, since we married young and moved from our parents' homes right into an apartment of our own. Frequently, in fact, I felt like a child – behaved like a child through those years – again especially in front of her. That's it – I am a child.

Our life was in many ways highly conservative: married in a Catholic church, big wedding, having two kids rather quickly, and then buying a house the year before. Yet, below the surface of normality, there was tension; tension over values and tension over what we wanted in the future, tension over commitment. To what degree was I really there through any of it? To what degree was she really there with me? Yet, I frequently felt suffocated by a presence that, paradoxically, was not really there at all – a contradiction. And now I am gasping for air.

Finally, these last six months, things erupt. Our separation is horrendous and traumatic. There are many bad feelings expressed and much incrimination. It is a rupture in time. The castle in the sky – the house of cards – collapses in a violent whoosh and now I find it increasingly difficult to be around her or interact with her. After so many years of being together, it feels totally and utterly unnerving and odd that we are not together, and that this person whom I thought I knew so well is turning into a stranger in front of my eyes. Perhaps she was always a stranger; I was just standing too close to see it.

I see her with her new boyfriend at the house I lived in just a few months ago. It strikes me as bizarre. It infuriates and upsets the hell out of me. And I feel this need to get away from it, to go somewhere to escape from this strange reality.

The human heart – the human mind - is a crazy thing. When she first tells me this past summer that she wants to separate I am extremely distressed. Although for many years I have felt a sense of both estrangement and entrapment, when the reality finally hits, I find myself not wanting to go through with it. I want her to stay. All of a sudden I feel this great love and longing for her. The power of the familiar is very difficult to let go of, even if you've felt there was something wrong with it. But I also think that I didn't appreciate her and took for granted what I had until it was pulled away from me. Is that it?

The first few months I am very lonely, very sad, and very depressed. I also get very confused. Why have I experienced this complete reversal in my feelings? Why do I want Laura back? Or is it a flip-flop? Is there something deep and primordial that I am oblivious to?

Did I really love her all along? Did I really want to be married? Yes and no – no and yes.

My mind is a jumble. My mind keeps swinging back and forth between extremes. Nothing seems to make sense. Perhaps that's good – perhaps that's to be expected. Perhaps that's how the journey begins.

A few months before we break up, I get stinking drunk one night and throw a fit, accusing Laura of mothering me. I keep yelling at her that I don't want to be mothered anymore.

Now, the mother gone, I've taken off into the darkness alone on the day after Christmas, searching for who I am in the solitude of a cold winter night. (Am I crazy? But spending Christmas alone is a terrible experience.) Indiana is four hours behind me and I am now heading northwest through the forested hills of Wisconsin on a desolate stretch of highway in a blizzard - destination Minneapolis – to see my old friend Tom and talk about things; to cry and vent and pace around.

But I have to focus on the road. My survival need kicks in. Waves of snow are lashing the windshield and I'm blinded by the white fury engulfing me. The world is a chaos of roaring elements. The snow is unbelievably thick. I can't see the road. I brake. When the wash of snow passes, the Mercury I am driving is straddling the highway. I look in my rear view mirror just in time to see the headlights of a big truck bearing down on me. I have five, perhaps ten seconds to get out of the way before the truck plows into me and I really descend into oblivion – absolute oblivion.

A minute later I am still alive, having pulled out of the way just before the truck goes zooming by, flashing its lights and honking its horn to hammer home that I was almost plowed over by a big semi going seventy miles an hour. I shake and tremble for a few minutes – my body knows how close it came to annihilation - but eventually I return to thinking about my life and where I am going with it.

I want to find myself. I want to be with someone. I am off alone. I am searching for the other. I am a contradiction.

I am thinking about time. I envision time as an elusive thing. Yet, I also think, contrary to Plato, that it is within time that reality is revealed, that reality is created. (I think of Gibson, that the essence of things is in the doing; in the process; in the transformation.) Reason and the intellect can try to grab hold of

the form of things, to clarify, identify, and put into some comprehensible order the pattern of existence, yet the forms of things keep changing. The “Word” is frozen but life is fluid and filled with contradictions. (The beginning can not be “The Word.”)

We are all in search of ourselves and the meaning of life, perhaps believing that the answer can be found in some principle or ultimate insight, or maybe some person or imagined deity, but can such a final resolution or answer ever be achieved? Things move within time and change colors along the way: trucks zip by; you look death in the eyes; wives leave you or you leave them; you leave your home and can not go back again; you change and can no longer find yourself.

The world is unsettled and things will not stay put. My life has come unglued. I am running. I am searching. I am zig-zagging down the road.

As I am driving along through the night, I am also thinking about God – the presumed absolute eternal stability, security, and authority over it all. Having been raised a Catholic, I dutifully go to church, confession, and Holy Communion as a youth, and regularly pray to God, at least on Sundays and every night before going to bed. But as a young adult, I rebel against the Church with its moral directives, ceremonies, and stories regarding the creation of the universe and humankind. I feel that the idea of a God is like a projected parental figure telling you what you can or can not do, or can or can not think or believe. But in college I come to see myself as a child of the Enlightenment, breaking free of superstition and the tyranny of elders. And I feel that individually determining your own life is critically important. At some point, one doesn’t need parental figures anymore, so I think. And there is Sartre and Nietzsche and the death of God. There is the freedom and individualism espoused in existentialism that both draws me and frightens me at the same time. (For Sartre, the self is nothingness – there is nothing to find.)

On the dark and frozen road that’s where I’m heading.

I have, over the last few months since Laura and I separated, been creating a second story, a story about God trapped in a cell of His own making. The story is a dramatized critique of Spinoza’s God. (But I also include the Devil in the story – a persona nowhere to be found in Spinoza.) If Spinoza’s God is everything and it is all determined, every last little nuance of life, then both God, as well as all of us, is trapped in this universe where everything is set. But I have been thinking that neither God nor the universe can be defined, even by God. God can not figure out who God is. (The universe is not a library, no matter how big it is.) I envision that the “Big Bang” – the act of creation, the last piece in the story I am writing - is when God decides to break free, to self-destruct, to go beyond His/Her own perfection. Creation is the death of God. Creation is breaking out of jail. I am breaking out of jail.

Yet immediately after the truck whizzes by, I thank God that I am still alive. On the road tonight I feel removed from everyone I know, but there in my mind is the feeling of God. Freud would say that the conscious sense of God that I feel is simply a parental projection, a personified presence created in my mind from so

many years of religious education and training, and that is precisely what I think to myself at that moment.

But more to the point, there are no atheists in trench holes, and I sure as hell feel like I am in a trench hole. I have collapsed into a believer again out of confusion, desperation, loneliness, and fear.

Still, though I have these insights and reach these conclusions why does the conscious presence of the other still hold on? I can't seem to reason myself into a state of felt autonomy. But you can't be reasoned out of something you haven't been reasoned into.

I think to myself that I wish that this sense of God within me would go away. (People go searching their whole lives for God and here I am trying to lose Him.) I want to be alone in the empty darkness of my head with no one there but me. I want to determine my own future based on what I want and what I think is right. But whom am I trying to break free of, God or Laura?

I am like crazy Descartes looking for myself in the void. I am driving along the road trying to realize Descartes' vision of self-discovery within the darkness, but this is impossible. I have written on this. I should know better. Why don't I see the contradiction between my own striving for individuality and my understanding of Gibson? One can not be free in absolute empty space. One doesn't discover oneself in a vacuum. But then I do have company that night – a presence I keep talking to, yet I keep trying to eject the presence from my consciousness.

And then, the question of God aside, there is also the need for another presence in my life - for a woman – for love. I feel this intensely now. I think about women a lot now that Laura has left. Yet I ask, if I want to be an individual, to be totally self-determined, why am I chasing after a woman in my dreams? Why am I chasing after women in the daytime, while awake?

I am just starting the journey into time, into the future. Though I believed that I left my parents and childhood home far behind – a good ten years ago, I have probably only just left the nest. I see that. This is only the beginning of the time travel story being played out. Harmony has drawn me out of the library.

Somewhere along the way to Minnesota I start thinking that the fundamental truths about life all sound like contradictions. (Is there a name for this principle?) You find yourself by losing yourself. The only thing that stays the same is that nothing stays the same. Perfection is corruption. Madness is good. Harmony requires chaos. "In nonsense is strength." Freedom is realized in a deterministic world – the more determinism the better. Take away all the presumed chains and supposed constraints on one's life and one becomes immobilized.

For the last twelve years I have secluded myself away, immersed in my books, at times wishing for freedom, and now that I am really free and on my own, I feel lonely. I have no idea what to do. Is something wrong with me – is all of this crazy thinking – and if so, so what?

Again, is it that the presence of Laura over the last twelve years has only become really apparent to me by her absence, or is it that the loneliness of my existence all those years with her only became palpable when there was no

longer someone there to occlude the fact, to numb the feeling? Did I numb the feeling with sex?

One may not discover oneself in a vacuum, but one doesn't discover oneself in a cell either. The philosophers of the Enlightenment knew that.

Perhaps God is speaking to me. Perhaps he is saying, "I understand that you don't believe in me. You don't even believe in yourself. But here are a few ideas to consider, a few points to ponder that will open the door into the future."

* * * * *

Go backwards in time around two months before the ride through the blizzard in Wisconsin – another time travel story – don't wish too hard for your heart's desire – you just might get it – the moth flying into the flame.

She has long elegant fingers with dark colored nails. There are jeweled rings on both of her hands. She reaches across towards my hands which are resting on the table. There is electricity when she touches my hands. Her eyes are also like jewels, bright and alluring, scintillating like her rings. She is smiling at me. She is wearing a soft cashmere sweater. If I recall correctly, it is pink. I can feel it though I am not (yet) touching it. I can feel her as well through my eyes – direct perception. I can smell her too. I am mesmerized.

She is like a bird. She is singing to me, for me. She is a siren and I am Odysseus trying to find my way home.

This is the beginning.

She is the second woman I will love. She is the second woman I have total sex with in my life – take that back – actually she is the first. (I remember, though, she always said "making love" and never simply "having sex.") I feel that I have been drawn into this whirlwind of passion, of excitement, this enticement.

That first night we go to my apartment. I remember her naked beautiful ass undulating up and down in the glow of the bedroom light. I remember pursuing and pushing, but I also remember being pulled and drawn. I remember feeling freed from the past. After our first encounter - right out of the blue, a spontaneous meeting, a coming together with a total stranger – I want to see her everyday.

I chase after her for two months. I am drawn to her sensuality, her sexuality, the energy of her being. She is very much alive. She moves her hands about dramatically when she talks. She sparkles and she performs. She argues with me. She teases me. She flirts with me. She is a free spirit. I am pulled into this and I go after it.

She strokes my ego, talks to me in a way that no one has ever talked to me before. She tells me dirty jokes. She tells me how attractive and desirable I am. I am nervous around her. Am I afraid I am going to lose her?

There are many romantic evenings along the way. We light candles. We drink wine. We travel up to Chicago to exotic restaurants. This is all new. But then, at the end of such evenings, she must go home and she disappears again into the night.

I propose marriage to her, though I am not yet officially divorced from Laura. (What am I, crazy?) She tells me it is all too fast. She says that I am on the rebound. She says that things are great between us so why get married and spoil it all?

She says I should go out with other women. This hurts me.

She gets ill and withdraws away. I get impatient with it all, and that's the night I hit the road for Wisconsin. When I return I go over to her house, and we argue. And it ends as quickly and dramatically as it began.

Her hair is streaked blonde. She sways her hips when she walks. She is a fox. She can't keep her house in order. She is always in a rush. She holds her head high and she is deeply and obsessively angry with her ex-husband. Something about her becomes implanted in my brain, an archetype that stays with me. An intimation of what is to come.

That was Suzanne.

* * * * *

Sometime later in the winter, Laura calls me on the phone. She wants to talk. After trying throughout the summer and fall of the year before to change her mind about breaking up, I have finally given up. And there was Suzanne – now gone. And then, when I least expect it, Laura calls me. We get together at a restaurant and she tells me that we belong together. She tells me that she has changed her mind about things. She tells me that all the things I said to her back when I was trying to keep things together have finally sunk in. But mostly, she just sits there and looks at me with those eyes.

I realize though that I am angry with her, angry over how she handled the whole thing, over how she broke up with me. I ask her if she is now alone. She says that she is, but down deep I don't believe her – don't trust her. And I feel that her effort to resolve things is half-hearted at best. And after having suffered through the worst of it, I am beginning to feel OK on my own. I am feeling better about myself. Isn't this what I wanted anyway?

After a number of meetings I tell her that I want a divorce.

In court, the judge asks me if our differences are irreconcilable and I say yes. I look at Laura when I answer this question and she stares back at me with a sense of judgment in her eyes. (A look that was probably there for a long, long time but one I hadn't consciously noticed.) She answers "Yes" to the same question, yet it seems to me that she says it because I do. But our differences were perhaps always irreconcilable. It just took over ten years to acknowledge it openly.

The whole thing though haunts me. Perhaps we shouldn't have been married. Perhaps we lived in different realities with different values. Perhaps part of me felt suffocated and constrained; perhaps part of me couldn't really grow. But I carry with me a love for Laura after all is said and done. She is the first one. And I also carry with me a sense that there is something wrong with the life of the intellect, something missing, something dysfunctional, something disconnected and dissonant with realizing the good life – with realizing love. I have been

unconsciously afflicted with dualism. And her face follows me for many years to come.

* * * * *

It is the early summer of 1977. I am sitting with Bill on the porch of his cabin in the forested hills of central Pennsylvania. Bill has a teaching job at a local college and I have come to visit him for a week. Bach is playing, booming outward into the thick woods surrounding us. We are drinking strong coffee out of big heavy mugs and discussing the nature of quality and love.

As I mentioned before, Bill is a real sharp cookie. I love talking with him. I also very much enjoy coming to his place in Pennsylvania. We are out in nature; the rush and noise of urban life is gone. And Bill is such a calm and jovial soul. Around him, staying at his place, my existential worries and ubiquitous underlying stress seem to vanish.

The year before I had also visited Bill for a couple of days (while I was still with Laura) and he recommended a new book he was reading, Robert Pirsig's *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*. I have no interest in motorcycles or Zen for that matter, but Bill says that the book is really something – deep philosophy - and I should go out and get it. He wants to talk about it. I read Pirsig's book later that year, a big part of it while I stay with Tom in Minneapolis during the Christmas break. Over the next couple of summers, Bill and I discuss it in great depth. Both of us clearly resonate with the ideas in it. The key idea in Pirsig is quality, what it means and why we should go after it.

Pirsig makes a fundamental distinction in his book between two different modes of knowing and approaches to life. He refers to these two approaches as the "classical" and the "romantic." Basically, the classical approach emphasizes reason, logic, and abstraction; the romantic approach emphasizes passion, intuition, and concreteness. Pirsig's distinction follows rather closely the distinction made between Rationalism and Romanticism, or the Apollonian and the Dionysian. Although I have already thought about this distinction, Pirsig really drives the point home and helps me to clarify in my own mind the contrasting philosophies.

In popular common sense psychology the distinction is frequently made between thinking and emotion, and we often say that some people seem more rational, detached, and logical, whereas other people seem more emotional and intuitive. (In Jungian psychology this distinction is fundamental and basic to personality assessment.) Of course, everyone both feels and thinks and we often seem to switch back and forth, depending on the situation, between being more cool and rational and more hot and emotional.

What Pirsig wants to achieve philosophically is a way of synthesizing these two modes of experience – of transcending them – and making contact with life and the world more holistically. For Pirsig, the Romantic-Classical distinction is a creation of the Classical mode of thinking, of creating sharp abstract distinctions. Within this rationalist framework, thinking asserts its individuality and separateness from emotion, (Does this sound like Plato? Like

Descartes?) Pirsig believes that in dissolving this distinction one can experience the world holistically and tune into the quality of things.

Pirsig also discusses the subject/object distinction, the experienced separation between the conscious self (the self as knower) and the world (the objects of awareness). As I have already described, Descartes radically distinguished the conscious mind and the physical world, but following Gibson's ecological theory, the self and the world are reciprocal realities and experienced in relationship with each other. Pirsig, though, believes that in transcending the Classical-Romantic distinction in how we approach the world, we can realize a sense of unity/oneness with the world experienced: that is, the subject-object or self-other distinction disappears. This dissolution is what happens in the experience of quality. The "I" evaporates (speaking metaphorically) into the object and vice versa; there is simply quality. This, in a sense, is a Zen state: there is no me or other, there just "is." The Chinese Taoists talk about being in the *Tao*, of not resisting or forcing one's will on the world but becoming one with the *Way* of things. Csikszentmihalyi, whom I will discover years later, similarly describes "flow" as a state where one is so immersed in a task that the sense of self disappears, though in "flow" one does try to guide reality. Gibson likes the word "resonate" in describing perception, which has a similar ring to it – one resonates with the environment – but Gibson argues that the perceptual and proprioceptual poles of experience stay present, even when one is in resonance with the world.

So if, according to Pirsig, the state of oneness is the key to the experience of quality, what indeed is quality? Bill and I especially debate this point. Quality can mean what a thing is, as in a listing of the qualities something possesses. Quality can mean the properties of something, such as its color, size, or shape. But quality can also mean excellence, as in a high quality piece of art. Something of value has "quality." It seems that Pirsig means both of these things, the nature of the thing and the excellence (or value) of it, and perhaps, indeed, the two are connected; that what something is, is precisely what it is worth, or its value. (This idea, in fact, sounds very much like Gibson's concept of affordances: the nature of something is its function and value.) But Pirsig resists trying to provide a verbal description or definition of quality, as if to do so is to provide a rational or conceptual box in which to place what is beyond words. (Yet, it should be noted that many philosophers, mystics, and spiritualists frequently identify something which, according to them, cannot be put into words and then immediately start to describe it.) Pirsig clearly seems to think, though, that quality is ultimate reality, existing prior to attempts to conceptualize it. And he also seems to think that if one mentally distinguishes the object from oneself, one loses the ultimate reality of things. One can not stand back from reality and understand the nature of reality. One must participate in reality – without trying to describe (or control) it – and then one intuits it, experiences its quality.

And this is a strange insight. Whereas science and rational philosophy have taken the view that "objectivity" – the truth of things – is to be found by standing back and detaching oneself from the object studied, lest subjective bias and emotionality get in the way, Pirsig says the reverse: lose oneself in the

experience and reality is found. But then, to recall, Gibson thinks the same thing: actively engage the world and the world reveals itself to you.

Such a mode of consciousness, of losing oneself, would appear to describe fairly well the experience of deep love with another. To love another is to be immersed, becoming one with the other. Whoever says it – Bill or me (and it is hard to tell in our dialogues where ideas originate) one of us concludes that to be in a state of love is to experience quality, and love need not just refer to love of another human being. It can refer to being in love with nature, in love with art or music, in love with ideas or knowledge, or in love with the cosmos or God.

But I'm not sure, given my Gibsonian background, whether one ever completely loses oneself when one is immersed in something of quality. Can the subject – object distinction ever completely go away in consciousness?

Still, Pirsig's idea of quality appeals to me. Sometimes in reading parts of Pirsig, it seems that what he is saying is that the quality of something is its "uniqueness." Within the rational mode of consciousness we abstract and conceptualize. We say that we have a body; that we have a mind; that we are sitting in a chair; that there are various plants, items of furniture, etc. in our environment. All these nouns used to identify the objects of consciousness are abstractions, referring to classes of similar objects, but the concrete fact is that each object in the environment is a unique reality, a particular. The world is not filled with abstractions, but it seems that our minds are. This appears true especially when it comes to persons. Each person is a unique and special reality, and to try to describe or capture that reality in terms of abstractions (for example, the person is smart, kind, wise, considerate, and temperamental) misses the real essence of the person. It appears to me that Pirsig, in his idea of quality, is trying to get away from this tendency to identify the nature of something with its abstract features.

Beginning with the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle, and continuing into the Middle Ages and modern times, a fundamental distinction has been made between abstractions and particulars. Plato saw the world of time as consisting of particulars, of distinct, concrete, and transforming realities, whereas, in the eternal realm there exist abstract ideal forms. Plato separated the abstract and the particular. Aristotle, on the other hand, believed that the "form" of a particular thing (its chair-ness or tree-ness) did not reside in a different realm, but within the particular itself. The abstract and particular reside in the same reality. Aristotle rejected Plato's ontological dualism.

Now in everyday language when we describe reality, we use abstractions. We identify the abstract form of what is being described, as in, for example, the sentence, "I am sitting on a chair." "Chair" is an abstract noun and "sitting" is an abstract verb – each refers to a conceptual class – of similar objects and similar actions respectively. Yet, it seems that something is lost in this description, namely, reality. The world clearly seems to consist of particulars. Each chair is a unique thing. No matter how I may try to capture this uniqueness – this concrete reality - in language and conceptualization, I miss it. Hence, to achieve a state of really knowing or experiencing reality, (even the term "reality" should be avoided here since it is an abstraction) to realize Zen and experience quality, is to

experience the immediate non-conceptualized uniqueness of “beings,” what (I will learn later) the Zen Buddhists call *genjokōan*, or “presence of things as they are,” their “suchness.” In the East, this immediate consciousness is enlightenment.

But on this last point, although I see the unique around me – though it makes sense intuitively - I also realize that there is a problem with this idea. As Feyerabend argued, all observation is filled with the influences of theory and concepts; how can one simply open one’s mind to the particulars? How can one directly apprehend the uniqueness without conceptualization?

But didn’t Gibson say that we can make contact with the world – but the world relative to the perceiver? We make contact with affordances. Is this the essence of things?

So Bill and I sit and discuss abstractions, abstractions that are leading me to think that abstractions can never lead me to real knowledge and enlightenment. But Bill and I are really good with the abstractions and so we sail around in the Platonic realm commenting on the earthly realm below. We especially talk about – theorize about – love, as philosophers, but clearly we are searching for it in our lives. We are searching for the real thing.

In the morning we philosophize over coffee, in the evenings we do it over beer. In the morning it is birds chirping, in the evenings we are accompanied by the sounds of frogs and crickets calling out to each other off in the dark woods. It seems to me that Bill’s cabin is the ideal place to discuss anything and everything; one has only to pull up a chair in front of nature, wild and rich and colorful and yet peaceful, and the thoughts come forth like a fountain of illumination.

Perhaps I am finding myself but I am also looking, looking for someone. Laura had just been the wrong person. Perhaps I just don’t want to be married, but I definitely don’t like the solitude. Books and abstractions clearly are not enough. The intellect can not stand alone. Love and companionship are equally, if not more, important. I keep obsessively having such thoughts over and over again.

The long and the short of it is that after the divorce from Laura, what rises up rather quickly in my consciousness, in my inner being, is this powerful desire to find love. Hence, I am perpetually restless in Indiana. I have trouble sitting in my new apartment. Talking about Pirsig, quality, and love with Bill resonates with my present state of being. I am trying to figure it out.

In taking the idea of quality as uniqueness and applying it to the question of love and knowledge of another person, I think that love is experiencing the uniqueness of the other person and that when one immerses oneself in the other person, this uniqueness is revealed. Immersion is not a passive, receptive process though. As I described, immersion or love is interactive and attentive and it doesn’t happen all at once; it requires time. The more you look, the more you see. Love is perceiving the quality of the other person revealed over time. But not to make this sound like a one-sided thing, being in love involves each person immersing oneself in the other and each person experiencing the uniqueness of

the other. Being in love is a coupling of beings in flow. It is being in flow with each other.

And finally, in order to be seen, one must show and reveal. One can be closed and guarded and then it becomes a challenge to see the person. Part of being in love is the desire to reveal oneself to the other person. It is the desire to be naked. A corollary I will come to later is that in one sense it is impossible, and in another sense, totally undesirable, to be physically naked to another person with whom one is not in love.

In the coming years, I visit Bill frequently and we talk about Pirsig, love, quality, Gibson, the philosophy of science, and a host of other philosophical topics. Bill eventually moves from his cabin in Pennsylvania, but he always lives somewhere out in nature, in forested hills down dirt roads. It is a far cry from the world of cities and super-highways that I exist in. It is great to visit him and leave all the other stuff behind, if only for a short while. But each time I go to see him I think things out some more and return to life ready to go at it with some new ideas, some new angles on how to come at things.

Bill has several German Sheppard dogs and the alpha male is named Helmholtz, after the great nineteenth-century scientist and theorist on perception, Herman von Helmholtz. Helmholtz frequently sits with us on the front porch while Bill and I talk. He looks at us with his big dark eyes and it really feels like he understands what we are talking about, as if the soul of the man Helmholtz were reincarnated in this dog at this time to see how thinking on the nature of perception, knowledge, and reality has progressed in the hundred years since he died. I feel like I can see into the mind of this dog and he can see into my mind as well. There is this sense of resonance. There is this sense of the mysterious.

* * * * *

It is the late summer of 1977. I am sitting in my apartment staring at the bust of the Neanderthal man I have sculpted out of clay. The face is powerful and realistic – it looks like there is a mind in there. The room is dark except for the flickering lights of candles. The smell of incense wafts through the air and the eerie and ethereal music of Schoenberg's *Transfigured Night* keeps rhythm with the shimmering candle light reflecting off the walls of the apartment and the starkly illuminated face of the bust of the man from the distant past. Everything in the room seems to be pulsating in tune with the strange and compelling sounds of Schoenberg's music. The Neanderthal man appears to gaze back at me in the darkness, his strong somber face looking paradoxically sad yet wise. I feel as if I am looking into myself as I gaze back at him (but then I created this vision in the clay), or perhaps he is looking into me (in sculpting him the face seem to emerge in the clay). Across time we speak to each other. Whatever is going on, we are in resonance late at night, amidst candles, incense, and the sailing violins of Schoenberg.

I am thinking that the place where one lives should reflect one's mind, one's soul, one's spirit. Ecology should mirror psychology. When I moved into the

apartment a few months earlier, after my divorce, I arranged my furniture and belongings along traditional lines, putting my fold-out bed in the bedroom and the living room furniture in the living room – as it should be. (I had always lived in traditional conservative households.) I tried to squeeze my books and desk into the dining room, which I was using as a study, but I had too many books and the bookcases spilled over into the adjacent living room. On the walls I had a few posters and a painting I had done of Don Quixote, copying, I believe, very accurately and with artistic flair Picasso's black on white version of Quixote and his partner, Sancho Panza.

But the rooms feel too normal, bleak, and uninspiring. I have never had a place of my own and in a flash the question occurs to me, why must I keep the apartment arranged along these traditional lines? If it is my apartment, I can do anything I want with it. The reality of my freedom suddenly hits me, a freedom that has been there since the split with Laura but has gone unrecognized. Such is the power of long term conditioning and habit.

So I began to change things, mixing the rooms up and imbuing the walls, surfaces, and spaces with rich saturated colors and esoteric objects and decorations. I put a huge, bold picture of a glow-in-the-dark Brachiosaurus up on one wall in the living room and next to it a beer poster, reminiscent of the 1930s, picturing a dreamy naked woman, her blond hair and bronze skin illuminated in a spotlight of warm, revealing colors.

I go out and buy mauve modern living room furniture and set up the bedroom as the living room – placing the new furniture in there. I fill the room with beauty – big artificial flowers and bright and colorful tall feathers in pink and orange and purple and red. I put pictures painted in pastels up on the walls of the bedroom I have converted to the living room. There are no books in this room and I envision it as the love room.

The real living room (the biggest room in the apartment) I transform into the study, with bookcases and art surrounding me. I also put my foldout bed in this new study and during the day it functions as a couch. I cover the walls of the study in surrealistic, fantasy, and science fiction art, mostly posters, including Gilbert Williams' heavenly and iridescent space paintings, and Patrick Woodruff's dreamscapes that mix together images of aliens and alien worlds, hellish monsters, symbols of the unconscious, doll figures, and colorful animals, like a modern day version of Hieronymus Bosch with a good dose of Salvador Dali thrown in.

I take my dining room table and put it in the study and it serves as my desk and working area; my regular desk is too cramped for me to work at and, at any rate, I have always liked writing at a dining room table rather than a desk since college.

On one whole wall adjacent to the study I affix classical album covers, perhaps thirty of them. Beethoven, Brahms, Sibelius, Bach, and Ralph Vaughan Williams announce their presence on the wall.

Even in the small kitchen, I cover one wall with bright metallic paper and pasted cut-outs of figures from Patrick Woodruff on it. I fill every surface and every wall in the apartment with strange and colorful things.

One night I create a collage for the new study that measures around three feet by four feet. I stay up till four in the morning doing it. I paste pictures of philosophers, psychologists and classical composers on it, including Wittgenstein, Freud, Stravinsky, Debussy, and Spinoza, and mix them with paintings of Chagall and Maxfield Parrish, as well as the bizarre and idiosyncratic musical notations of Stockhausen. I also include quotes, such as Nietzsche's "There is always some reason in madness and always some madness in reason" and Sartre's "I am what I am not and I am not what I am." But I also put numerous Kliban cartoons around the collage, with titles such as "Whack your porcupine" and "Never give a gun to ducks." In one corner of the collage is the Top Ten Popular Tunes from Cashbox Magazine for the week of July 7th, 1960; the number one hit that week is "Three Bells" by The Browns. In the center of the collage I have a big picture, painted by Maxfield Parrish, of Humpty Dumpty and above the picture a quote from Kurt Vonnegut's book, *Breakfast of Champions*: "In Nonsense is Strength." I also include pictures of Marilyn Monroe, Charlie Chaplin, and right next to Wittgenstein, I paste a picture of Greta Garbo. I think that the collage is a great work of philosophical and cultural art, combining the absolutely profound and classical with the blatantly ludicrous and mundane. The collage dominates one wall in the study. If the apartment is intended to reflect the various rooms of my mind and psyche, then the collage is a snapshot of the smorgasbord of images, ideas, and feelings that perpetually circulate through my head: art, music, women, books, philosophy, the trivial and paradoxical, and heaven and hell. I am trying to create something new and at this point in time I am throwing colors, ideas, and images on the drawing board, and arranging them through artistic intuition rather than reason.

There are times when I think that all the color and energy in my apartment is to compensate for the depression and loneliness I frequently feel inside – a reaction formation. But I also think that the apartment is an act of exuberant self-expression after having felt suppressed for so many years. Both answers are probably right. I have come to the conclusion that divorce is an oscillatory phenomenon: emotions and behaviors swing back and forth; bodies press against each other, pulling together and then recoiling away. I feel depressed, angry, and even guilty over my marriage ending, as well as about how it ended, and yet I also feel exhilaration over being able to create a place of my own and live a freer lifestyle. I swing back and forth and there is a great deal of nervous energy in me, undoubtedly fueling my creativity as well as priming me for some significant move in my life. For many years, I have been focused, studious, and constrained, and the creative explosion, manifesting itself in decorating the apartment, is simply an initial wave of activity connected with trying to find my wings.

Most nights I am out, though, restlessly prowling about and looking for something or someone – I can't tell what – having a great deal of trouble sitting still. (I had sat still for the last ten years). Sometimes I find it very difficult just being by myself. Although I spend some evenings alone in my new apartment, reading or writing while listening to classical music, there is also a rather steady

stream of women who come and go over the year and a half I spend in this bizarre and wonderful place.

As I come to learn, there are many young women out there ready and willing to couple and connect. One is the lovely brown-haired Janine, an extremely bright student in one of my psychology classes. Janine has long beautiful legs and a luscious round ass. Her slightly pointed chin and nose match the animation in her bright, intelligent eyes. Janine is sharp. She is a delectable combination of mind and body and her energetic presence draws me in. Janine likes me and I like her. Once she has completed the class she has with me, she visits me in my apartment. She decides to help in the redecorating of the apartment and the construction of the collage. One night, taking a break from working on the apartment, she and I watch the old 1950s version of *War of the Worlds* together. Maybe we are stimulated by the ray guns in the movie, or maybe it is the profusion of fake flowers and eclectic art in my place, but immediately afterwards, in a moment of sudden impulse, we move from the living room to the study and make intensely passionate love on my fold-out bed. Janine is adorable and vibrant. I feel a complete resonance, an undulation, with her. Had the timing been different, who knows, perhaps something would come of it, but the romance ends in a month. And as Vonnegut says, "And so it goes ...and so it goes..."

There is also the slender, petite, and shapely Sharon. She is a fair-skinned, natural blond, and wears tinted granny glasses which accent her pretty and rather delicate face. Sharon's personality is anything but delicate though. One day, she comes up to me – I hardly know her - and simply says, "You're beautiful." Then she asks me if I want to fuck.

And there is the cute, big breasted Lori who simply loves sex. We are together a few months and that is that. There are others, but I can't last very long with anyone. I am living the dream life of a young bachelor (a dream that had been pushed to the back of my mind the previous ten years), but the series of women eventually becomes a blur, a parade of pretty faces and naked bodies. I am sowing the seeds of my own destruction. I am lost in a Dionysian reverie – a Newtonian counter-reaction to middle class monogamy and Apollonian order.

At some level, at every level, the whole thing feels wrong, alien and out of whack. How did I get into this situation? A couple of years before I had been living with my wife and kids, perhaps not totally happy, but definitely feeling a sense of security and stability – a sense of the known. I was teaching college and finally making a decent salary after being rather poor through graduate school. Generally, my life up to that point in time had been a relatively smooth trajectory out of childhood, into adolescence, and then young adulthood. It felt normal, perhaps oppressive in ways, but normal. I thought I had a relatively clear sense of who I was and what I wanted. But this all now seems like a dream. Divorced, on my own, all these women coming and going, the fantastical layout of my apartment, it feels like something evil has entered into my life – into me - and sent me spinning out of control into this alternative universe. (But wasn't I drawn to this? Wasn't this within me? Wasn't I creating this in my mind?) The Apollonian has been kicked out the door and the id has invaded, or been let free, into my

conscious reality. More to the point, having left the mother figure and gotten over being home sick, the wild crazy kid underneath let loose.

One day in the apartment I get the impulse to buy a tarantula which I name Rachmaninoff because the beautifully coordinated movements of his eight legs remind me of the skillful motions of the great pianist and composer. One night, though, Rachmaninoff curls up in a ball, looks like he (or she – who could tell?) is going to die, and as I watch, a slimy gray ball begins to appear on its back. I can not go to sleep since I have no idea what is happening and the whole scene frightens and unnerves me. But then after a couple of hours of this strange and rather ugly transformation, I realize that Rachmaninoff is molting. The next morning, the old exoskeleton lies there, beginning to shrivel up. The new Rachmaninoff, still wet and gray, is sitting unperturbed as if nothing has happened. The next day I bring Rachmaninoff back to the pet store. It is just too much for me to watch such a thing. Afterwards I keep thinking that maybe I am molting, that the spider was in resonance with my own ongoing transformation.

It is about this time that the theory occurs to me that it is just when everything is exactly as you want it; when harmony has been achieved; when the forces of the cosmos seem to have come into complete resonance with one's inner self, that a meteorite will hit. Perfect order and equilibrium is not a good thing; it seems to provoke its opposite of disaster and chaos.

But then maybe humans (at least some of us some of the time) sabotage ourselves. We get what we think we want and then on cue we decide to destroy it or throw it away. (Is it that we don't feel we deserve it?)

Then of course a third possibility is that even if it looks like you've achieved the best of all possible worlds, down deep, somewhere in your mind, you realize that something is terribly wrong and unbeknownst to your conscious ego, you self-destruct to get things moving in a different direction – a better direction. For example, you start reading science fiction. Secularists might refer to this process as the unconscious having its say in things; spiritualists might say that the hand of God is at work.

By the following year I have dismantled the apartment and left on my first great trek out west, toward Colorado. I try to take the essence of the apartment with me, my art, music, books and various "artifacts," but over a short period of time, it all dissipates and falls apart – to die and be reborn again in the far distant future.

Thus begins a five-year period of circling around the country, alternating between the east coast and the far west, a trajectory that seems to mirror, in sympathetic reciprocity with my psychological states, the circuitous workings of my mind as I ruminate over what I think I want in life.

But I am jumping ahead in the story.

* * * * *

One night I decide that I am going to leave my teaching job in Indiana and head west in search of a new life. The idea of heading east had died after my divorce from Laura. The decision to go in the opposite direction occurs in a

Howard Johnson's restaurant at 2:00 in the morning over steak and eggs talking with Frankie.

Frankie and I had grown up together, friends off and on through grammar school and high school back in Waterbury, and once free from the control of his parents and his first wife, he let loose and gave in to a wanderlust that would eventually carry him to Alaska. Coming out to see me is his first stab at finding a new direction for himself. It is the late summer of 1977.

The Howard Johnson's is appropriately located at the crossroads of the Interstate highways 80, 90, and 94. In one direction the highways head back east toward where I was born and grew up, to Connecticut and other states in the northeast; in the other direction the highways head west toward the open plains, the Rockies, the sun and hot deserts of the southwest, and eventually California. The two opposing directions define the past and the future for both of us.

Frankie and I have been out to the local bars, drinking tequila, and we are sitting by ourselves discussing what we are going to do with our lives. Both of us are recently divorced, participants in the great surge of broken and failed marriages that is sweeping the country, being carried along by the rise of individualism, liberalism, the loss of commitment, free love decoupled from real love, and the hippie culture of drugs and rock n' roll and doing your own thing. Frankie and I want to leave the past behind and find something new out west. Frankie is all charged up – in part on the tequila – and ready to go.

Over the last year I have read Robert Pirsig and the story of his odyssey across the country on a motorcycle, and also Carlos Castaneda's series on altered states of consciousness and the teachings of Don Juan, books that, significantly, take place out in the desert southwest. I have also been devouring the writings of Kurt Vonnegut, including *The Sirens of Titan*, *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater*, *Breakfast of Champions*, and *Cat's Cradle*. Vonnegut's ideas on the comedy and absurdity of life are great medicine for my unsettled heart, funny and metaphysical at the same time. In particular, his great dark science fiction novel *Slaughterhouse Five*, which I read concurrently with Pirsig, pulls me out of my present reality and lifts up my soul. Somehow the two books – Pirsig and Vonnegut – go together. In *Slaughterhouse Five* a man jumps around through time. He lives through war and disaster, finds love with a highly erotic movie star, and dies, over and over again. Vonnegut frees my spirit. All of this new stuff stirs up my juices and primes me for Frankie's visit.

Northwest Indiana with its steel mills and deteriorating cities and towns has been oppressive to me, right from the start, and now I really want to get away. What is holding me, I wonder, except a steady job? Again another expanding wave of freedom comes over me. Do I have to stay here just because Laura and our kids are here? Who cares what she thinks? And at some level, I am sure I want to distance myself from her. Frankie and I promise each other that the next summer we will head west, perhaps together.

Also, the idea had been growing in me over the previous couple of years that I want to leave academia and become a science fiction writer. I love the world of books and ideas but I have been in school either as a student or a teacher all of my life, and I think I need to break free of this cocooned existence

and dive into the rough and tumble “real world.” (Where did I get this idea from?) The strange, exhilarating, and mind-expanding science fiction universes of outer space, aliens, alternative realities, time travel, and the future strongly appeal to me. I can become a science fiction writer out west, amidst the mountains, desert, open skies, and cactus. (I don’t stop to ask myself if this is really diving into the “real world.”)

* * * * *

But, of course, since I am a ship set adrift upon the open sea, never having learned to steer my craft really on my own, and since I am distressed and exhilarated and confused over my parting with Laura, and since I am out on the streets chasing girls again – a throwback to my teenage years – and probably for a million other reasons, I make a mistake, a big one.

While I was in college, and later in graduate school, and into my first years of teaching I had pretty much steered clear of smoking pot. The Hippies had tempted me, but after a couple of tries, I decided I didn’t like the effect and stayed away from it. But now, feeling lonely at night and no longer sequestered off in my study, I start to go out with lots of different people. Among these various friends, acquaintances, and lovers some smoke pot. I try it again, and then again, and then again, and by late in 1977, it is becoming a habit.

For me it seems to work as a stimulant. It charges up my mind and spirits and provokes intense, complex trains of thought, of insights and visions. It is another way that I am expressing my freedom, my Romantic/Dionysian side. I create art (for example the collages) while stoned. I have sex while stoned. I engage in incredible conversations with people – so I believe – while stoned. I became totally immersed in movies while stoned.

Out on the street a culture of marijuana holds sway – the evolution of what had first emerged in the late sixties. It is the thing to do. It is connected with emancipation and free thinking, of exploring consciousness, of feeling good, of not being straight (who wants to be straight?).

The “double-edged sword” of drugs, including marijuana, is that they frequently do have positive effects on a person’s moods and states of mind – albeit short term effects. They can calm you down when you’re nervous and elevate you when you are depressed. They can wake you up if you are tired and drained and put you to sleep if you have to get up early the next morning. They can put you in a happy sociable mood. They can relax inhibitions; they can heighten the senses. But they become habits and are subject to the law of diminishing returns. You start to need them, to want them on a routine basis and your tolerance grows over time.

I wish I could say – in resonance with the Hippies and the liberals – that pot is relatively harmless, non-addictive, and actually beneficial in some ways, freeing the mind and spirit to see deeper, to feel deeper, to chill out and calm down. I wish I could say that pot brings enlightenment – one of the central arguments of the Hippie culture. But I can’t say these things. In the long run it

deadens and confuses the human mind. It creates lethargy. It clouds one's judgments. It gets you doing things you would never do otherwise. It gets you doing the same stupid things over and over again. It creates negative after-effects. In this regard it is like alcohol. It is not a good idea to make major life changes if you are using pot. Nothing lasts – nothing ever lasts – with pot. It is a killer.

But first you must make the mistake before you can learn the lesson and give the speech. In the fall of 1977 I am getting high and haven't, as of yet, flown off the ledge. That is coming.

* * * * *

It is my last class in Indiana. There are approximately one hundred students in the auditorium and I am finishing up a section of introductory psychology. I have taught this course at least a dozen times in the last five years. At the beginning, back in 1973, I was somewhat stiff – too scientifically detailed at times and too abstract and theoretical on other things – and really not well enough oiled. The lectures did not sing. As time goes along though, substance and style mesh, and now in the late spring of 1978, in this last class I intend to swing a bit in the opposite direction, and get personal and philosophical on this final day.

I talk about Plato and his theory of perfect or absolute ideals. Being Aristotelian and Gibsonian I have always argued against the idea of a higher realm and a dualistic split in reality, but I tell the students that there is something of importance in Plato: the belief in and the aspiration toward ideals. Are these ideals on a higher plane of existence? To me it doesn't matter. What matters is that we all need to believe in something more elevated; something to provide us with standards of excellence, with standards of truth and beauty and the good. There is the "real" and there is the "ideal," and the ideal provides the real with a sense of direction and a set of principled values. We can not live without this vision of perfection, even if we can not realize it. We should seek it out, clarify its nature, and use it to structure and inform our lives.

It is an odd way to end introductory psychology. But what I say comes from my heart – from my mind. It is philosophy applied to life.

I listen to what I say and take it with me and dive into the abyss.

* * * * *

*"Let us draw closer to the fire so
that we may better see what we are saying."*

Chinese Aphorism

We are heading out across the open plains, the monotonous, amazingly flat, endless, open plains of Nebraska. In every direction lie vast fields of grass, corn, or sometimes just plain dirt, sprinkled with farmhouses and intermittent silos off in the distance. Beyond it all stretches the interminable horizon line and nothing more for hundreds and hundreds of miles. We are building up momentum, heading toward the ascent up the backbone of the continent, the Rockies looming right ahead. Frankie is ahead of us, driving the U-Haul and Lisa and I are following in my Camaro. We have popped “black beauties” and are in over-drive.

I have known Lisa about six months. She has bright beautiful dark eyes, an enchanting smile, a warm and caring heart, and a girlish sexuality that I am powerfully drawn to. Though I am unaware of it at the time, our coming together is the result of friendly wager Lisa made with her friend, Denise, over who could get my attention first and land a date.

This is how it happened – how we met – and how Lisa won the bet.

One night Lisa comes walking up to me with a button on her coat that says “Smile if You Love Me.” I smile of course. As I said, Lisa has bright beautiful eyes and who can resist that? Tall and thin with dark lustrous hair, it isn’t so much her beauty that attracts me as the quality of purity that she emanates, of the girl next door. Lisa was raised a Baptist, and taught this pure and innocent look, presumably from early on. When I meet her I have just been thinking to myself, over the last couple weeks, that I need to stop all of this pointless sex with one woman after another that has become the pattern in my life, and I decide that I really need to find a good friend, someone I can talk to and enjoy being with as a true companion. I am looking for a woman with a good heart. That night we first smile at each other and start talking, I ask her out dancing and I fall in love.

But Lisa is a student of mine (another major mistake to add to my growing list) and on top of that Lisa is still a girl in many ways, just barely approaching twenty-one. (But then, that probably attracts the boy in me.) She isn’t very happy with her present life and finds the idea of leaving it all very attractive. She is still with her parents and wants to go off with me on my adventure out west. I don’t think it is such a good idea, for she is significantly younger than me (nine years in fact) and I keep thinking that what she really wants to do is simply run away from her parents. I think that if she runs away from her parents now, someday in the future, when I have been transformed into the substitute parent, she will run away from me as well. But Lisa is persistent, and she keeps telling me how much she loves me. Naturally I find it very appealing to go on this journey into the unknown with an attractive and loving young woman – a very sexy young woman. And, I am on Pirsig’s quest, looking for quality and the unique, searching for Gibsonian love and the intimacy of another; I am looking for Harmony. Yet Lisa doesn’t share the same dream with me, the dream of heading out west on an intellectual and existential adventure. And she surely closes her eyes, and her heart, to the fact that I’m not intending to settle down into some middle class eight-to-five job. I want to be a science fiction writer. I know that we think differently, but my heart and my libido cave in, so we take off together.

I have made this mistake before, but of course, and as I said, it is an act of mindless stupidity to make major life changes or decisions on pot. As a fundamental principle in this regard, a principle that takes a long while to penetrate into my thick skull, people don't learn or grow if they smoke. If you are stoned you live in the present, in Santayana's "condition of children and barbarians." This is the philosophy of the Hippies, to live in the present, in the feelings and flow of the moment. The sad fact is that I have become a Hippie, and in giving myself over to this creed I am thrown into a replay of my adolescence and early adulthood. I have gone into a time machine that keeps me going round and round, visiting the same places, over and over again. This happens in *Slaughterhouse Five*, but in the book at least, enlightenment does come at the end.

But all clear thinking aside, here we are, heading to Boulder, Colorado, nestled at the base of the Rockies, the place Lisa and I have decided to move to. We had scouted out a number of western cities the month before on our first trip out west, including Phoenix, Santa Fe, and Santa Barbara, but we are drawn to Boulder. Frankie has decided that he is going to move to Denver – better job possibilities than Boulder – but we are all heading to Boulder first to attend a Rolling Stones concert. Frankie loves the Rolling Stones. We have to push it to get there on time.

On "black beauties" we make it from Indiana to Boulder in a little over one day. Such is the power and madness of drugs.

* * * * *

The concert is the next day. The Stones are performing at the University of Colorado stadium. The stadium fills up with tens of thousands of people, drinking, smoking pot, popping psychedelic pills, in the dead heat of the summer. Down on the stage loom the giant red lips – twenty five feet high – the symbol of the Stones. A number of guys sitting around us pop acid, to enrich their experience, see the colors of music, or something like that. The girl behind us, also trying to elevate her consciousness, slugs down a fifth of bourbon straight out of the bottle. Heated to the temperature in the stadium, the bourbon has the predictable effect. She throws up, in a big bourbon-colored gush, all over the people sitting to my left, including Frankie. Then she passes out and the medics come and take her away on a stretcher. The Stones are OK. I am much more a fan of Pink Floyd, the Beatles, Sibelius, and Beethoven, but none of them are playing here today.

The day after the concert, Lisa and I go looking for an apartment and find a place right away. It is a large modern complex with a western flair, and it is clean and bright and a million miles away from Indiana. Out of our front window a view of the foothills of the Rockies opens up and, looking at the magnificent peaks, it hits me that we really have ascended from the plains into the mountains. In a burst of industry, we unpack all of my stuff, tacking my album covers back up on one wall and interspersing many of my fantastical posters with the numerous bookcases. I have carted all of my books and most of my

belongings to Colorado. Lisa has only brought along her clothes and a few keepsakes; she is traveling light – I am traveling heavy.

On one of the first days of unpacking and setting up, the apartment manager comes over to say hello. About five minutes into his visit, he asks us for a mirror and, not knowing what he's thinking, we give him one. Thus equipped, he sits on the couch, casually takes out a bag of cocaine – as if he is taking out a pack of chewing gum - and spreads a few lines on the mirror, snorting up one or two for himself and asking us if we want some as well. Welcome to Colorado, I think. We sure as hell aren't in Indiana any more. We are in the Wild West.

Over the next couple of months we get our bearings and take in our new environment. This involves embarking on some harrowing drives with Frankie on which we venture further up deep into the mountains. We are seeing the sights. Frankie zips around canyon curves equally heedless of the sheer drops and the nerve-wracking effect on his passengers, in particular me. Adding to the effect of Frankie's driving is the altitude. Breathing the rarified air so high up in the Rockies leaves me feeling dizzy and strange, an effect that is heightened by the grass that Frankie has found a supplier for in Denver. It is a "Rocky Mountain High". But the Rockies are more fantastic and beautiful, more enthralling, magnificent, and stupendous than anything I have ever seen in my life before. Snow covered peaks, immense faces of rock dropping thousands of feet, huge forests thick with evergreens and interspersed with secluded glades rich with flowers and ultra-green grass... My mind – my senses – my perspective on things is blown away.

During this early period in Colorado, Frankie and Lisa and I party it up a lot. The discipline and focused effort, the self-imposed constraints of the preceding years totally falls away. It was already falling apart before I got here, but Colorado is finishing the job. I feel free. I feel lost.

We get into drinking shots of Mescal during this time. Mescal is an incredible high; the more we drink the more appealing the shriveled up worm in the bottle becomes. Mescal seems to wake you up rather than put you to sleep. I like this. After enough shots, the worms begin to seem appetizing and we cut them up and share them. Swallowing the worms makes me feel as if we are in Mexico, in the land of Don Juan.

We play rock music – Frankie has an incredible collection. We sing along to Lynyrd Skynyrd's "Free Bird." We listen to Pink Floyd, the Stones, Marianne Faithful, the Moody Blues, and a million obscure artists that Frankie thinks are the next great thing.

I am worrying, of course, through all of this. The Mescal, the pot, the music, sexy Lisa – can not drown out what is going through my mind. At some level, it just doesn't feel right. I feel that I am heading toward some great tumble off the side of a cliff. Part of me is in the mountains; part of me is watching the whole thing from some other place. It feels unreal. At times I think there is some deep blunder – existential and philosophical – in what I am doing. But didn't I want to go on an adventure?

To add to the disquiet and vertigo of it all, Lisa periodically gets attacks of guilt over taking off from Indiana, perhaps in unconscious resonance with my ill-

defined anxiety. Between the fun and games, she wavers over whether what she has done is the right thing. (She hasn't really run away from her parents; they are a phone call away, and she talks to them or writes to them every few days.) I suppose that I anticipated as much, and so between the two of us, the situation we are in is far from steady. I sure as hell don't want to go back to Indiana (which is going through Lisa's mind) but I am very uncertain whether what I am doing now is the right thing either.

But here we are in Boulder. Home of the University of Colorado, Boulder is a real Hippie town, but commercialized and touristy as well. Nestled in a high valley and overlooked by snugly packed older houses perched on the slopes, the downtown area is quaint, very Western in ways, and bustling with activity. It is filled with vagabonds on the road to Nirvana, and hikers and campers and nature lovers ready to journey to and perhaps live in the mountains. Alongside the camping gear outlets, music stores, and ice cream parlors, the New Age and the mystical have already found a home in its shops and restaurants and before long I find a science fiction/comic book store, the Mile High Bookstore, where Lisa and I browse around, take a break (from what?), and hang out.

One day I get to talking with a long-haired guy who appears to be a regular there. It strikes me rather quickly that he is very well educated, articulate, and highly intelligent (which sure as hell conflicts with his appearance), and he really knows science fiction. He is also very friendly and personable. I introduce myself and he tells me his name is Ed Bryant. I immediately recognize his name: he is a science fiction writer and I have read a few of his stories in the last couple of years. He is relatively young, a few years older than I am, and has not been publishing stories for that many years, but he has already won some awards for his writing. I tell him I am interested in becoming a science fiction writer and he says that he has a writers' group that meets in Denver (where he lives) and that he will read some of my stuff. Ed becomes my first new friend in Colorado. An opportunity – a synchronicity – opens up here, but it will slip through my fingers as I slide down the hill.

Lisa and I settle into our apartment pretty quickly and I try to sit down and start writing. I do this in the mornings, but nothing comes. Sooner or later as the day wears on, I get stoned and I am off with Lisa doing something else. The weeks go by and nothing much happens, pen to paper. My mind seems dead which, in fact, it is. More alarmingly, as the weeks go by, I am going through my money much faster than I expected. I hoped that I would have enough money to last at least six to ten months. In less than two months I am quickly going broke and I have written almost nothing.

Here I am sitting on top of the mountains with the grandeur and beauty of the Rockies to inspire me, but the season is changing; the leaves are beginning to turn red and orange, and the cold is starting to set in.

Faced with the hard reality, Lisa and I decide that we need to get jobs. Lisa finds a job in a bank and, with Ed putting in a good word for me, I get a job at the Mile High bookstore. Yet the romanticism of working in a science fiction/comic book store in Boulder quickly fades. I am no longer a college professor. (Who am I anymore?) I am at the bottom of the totem pole working for

minimum wage, packaging comic books that are mailed out to various customers around the country.

The domestic scene is also devolving toward its inevitable conclusion. What started off as a carefree, open-ended adventure (with a strong undercurrent of misgivings on my part) is taking its predictable course toward issues of order, control, and the future. Lisa is wavering over whether to stay in Colorado. She wants more of a commitment out of me. And, in a replay from the past, this means that she wants to get married. But I don't. Again there is this war of the wills between us and after much debate, I finally agree.

Ed has a license to marry people through the Universal Church of Christ, so he agrees to perform the ceremony. Frankie agrees to be the best man. We have around a dozen friends or acquaintances in Boulder that we invite, and we decide to have the ceremony in the Flat Irons, the grassy hills at the base of the Rockies. On the selected day, the snow covered Rockies behind us, Ed performs the ceremony. Engulfed in the beauty and power of nature, we seem part of some fantastical scene from some strange novel set in an alternate reality. The early autumn wind whips everyone's hair about and at times it is hard to stand erect and steady. In some kind of cosmic resonance, Ed comments that he hopes he isn't going to jinx our marriage since the last few couples he married have all separated or divorced. We celebrate back at our apartment with my five-star homemade chili and plenty of bottles of Mescal and of course plenty of pot. It is the beginning of the end.

The honeymoon, in fact, ends quickly and abruptly. More to the point, there is no honeymoon; we already had that. Paradoxically, things get increasingly tense between Lisa and me, even though I have gone through with the marriage. She is still ambivalent about Colorado. It seems like it is one thing after another with her. The more she keeps prevaricating on whether she wants to stay in Colorado or go back to Indiana, the more I am determined to stay. She has already gone back once in the early fall, before the marriage.

Why didn't I listen to my inner sense? I should have just let her be. Of course, she couldn't stay away from her parents. But I convince her to come back. I go back and get her. (She wanted to come with me; I financially supported her for the first few months; she committed to a partnership on this adventure; and now she wants to bail out? No way!)

It seems that I am trapped in some kind of determinist trajectory that keeps drawing me into some forgone conclusion. The Gestalt of the whole thing is no good.

Eventually, in November, Lisa leaves and once more goes back to her parents in Indiana. But she doesn't leave alone this time; she is carrying our son.

I want to love her; I want to participate in Pirsig's quality; I want her commitment. I want her to grow up.

My plan is to stay in Boulder, hoping that Lisa will eventually return. After blowing all my money and wasting the last six months on exploring the Rockies, getting stoned, and doing almost no reading or writing, at least I have the apartment and all my belongings. Maybe I can make it through the winter, alone or with her. Fat chance.

* * * * *

There is a man, a Jew, who lives in New York in the twentieth century. He is a skeptic but he wants to believe, in something. He is obsessed with Christ. Did Christ really rise from the dead? Was Christ really the Son of God?

This man meets a physicist, an inventor, who is looking for a guinea pig for his great metaphysical experiment. He has invented a time machine and he wants to test it out. The physicist needs someone who will get in the time machine and travel to some other time and then come back. Our Christ-obsessed Jewish skeptic agrees, but he wants to determine the destination of the trip and he wants to go back to the ancient Middle East and watch the Crucifixion to see what really happened. The physicist agrees.

The Jew travels back in time, but the time machine breaks apart upon arrival in the past. Materializing in the sky, it descends in smoke and flames and crashes to the ground, knocking the man unconscious. This “heavenly event” is witnessed by several people in the vicinity, one of whom is John the Baptist. Believing that the man in the flaming chariot that came out of the heavens is the Messiah, John takes the man back to his tent and cares for him. Once he has regained his wits, the man from the twentieth century attempts to explain to John that he is not the Messiah, but that rather he has come to look for him. John does not believe this, for didn’t the man come riding in on flames from the heavens above?

Once he is well enough, the time traveler decides to go in search of Jesus. He eventually tracks down the home of Mary and Joseph, but Mary and Joseph find it very surprising that anyone would want to talk to their son. Further, Mary comes across totally different from the loving, caring, pure-of-heart individual portrayed in the New Testament. This Mary is dark, depressive, more earthy and womanly than the Biblical image. But Mary leads the man into their home and takes him to a dimly illuminated back room. Off in the corner is a shadowy figure, hunched over. Dribble is coming out of the dark figure’s mouth. The man asks the person in the room if he is Jesus and the person responds by simply repeating his name over and over again. “Jesus, Jesus, Jesus.” The figure in the room is an imbecile, deformed and incapable of intelligent communication.

In a state of shock, the man from the twentieth century runs out of the room and heads out back into the desert. He wanders through the desert for days and days – forty days to be precise - trying to make sense out of what he has seen. It can not be. Something is terribly wrong. Where is the real Messiah? How could the Bible be so wrong? The man decides that the real Jesus – the real Christ – has not yet appeared but that he is coming and coming soon. Christ is waiting somewhere, ready to appear. The bizarre encounter in the dark room with the congenital imbecile is some kind of test of faith. So he decides after wandering through the desert that he will come back to the people and into the towns and villages and start to play act the role of the Messiah, until the real Messiah shows up. He has memorized all of the words presumably spoken by

Jesus, as recorded in the Bible. John believes he is the Messiah, so he will play the role, for the time being. He even tells people that he is Jesus of Nazareth.

So the sermons are spoken, the disciples are selected, the necessary actions are taken, and the man finds himself in front of Pontius Pilate, but he remains silent, waiting for the Son of God to come. The crown of thorns is placed upon his head and the Cross is placed upon his shoulder to carry up Mount Calvary. He waits, wondering, hoping He will come. The nails go through his hands and feet and the Cross is pulled up erect into the ground. And then, it hits him; no one is coming. It is he who is the historical figure recorded in the Bible. He is a time traveler who has appeared miraculously, as out of nowhere, from the heavens above. He is Christ and he dies on the Cross.

Two thousand years later He comes back to life, a Jewish child born in New York City, born again after having died on the Cross. The prophecy is fulfilled. He dies but has risen again, by the hand of God, by a time machine that has looped his identity through time.

But then, we can ask, where did the words come from that the man spoke and that are recorded in the Bible? He read and learned the words in the future, and said them in the past, to be recorded so he could memorize them in the future. The words have no author, or the author is God. As the words are eternal, so is the man. He dies in the past and is reborn in the future, only to return to the past and die again. His life goes round and round; there is no beginning, there is no end. "I am the Alpha and the Omega."

Written in the late 1960s, Michael Moorcock's *Behold the Man* is one of the most psychologically provocative, spiritually unsettling, and metaphysically elevating science fiction stories I have ever read. There are people to whom I tell this story; there are people to whom I won't. There are people who become outraged and upset to hear this tale.

But there is an archetype to all of its existence – of death and resurrection – and the past and the future circle around on themselves. And is this not the nature of God?

* * * * *

*"Good judgment comes from experience,
and a lot of that comes from bad judgment."*

Will Rogers

I have told part of this story before. I am suspended in the void, in the emptiness. I have no sense of having a body; I am consciousness, mind, spirit – an immaterial being.

After having adapted to the absolute darkness of the sensory isolation tank on my first few floats – my initial reactions are panic, anxiety, and a "projected" feeling that the walls of the tank are caving in on me – I find the times in the tank very calming. I come to think that the tank accelerates the process of learning how to meditate, an ecological context that facilitates the realization of

Nirvana. As I said before, within this reality the ego – the self – seems to disappear or fragment in pieces. The tank contains no stimulus information. There are no patterns, no variations. It is a total “Ganzfeld,” an omni-directional ambience of sameness. With no information there is nothing to perceive; the world, the body, the self all vaporize. There is death. Then there is emergence, resurrection out of the void when you exit the darkness.

After Lisa leaves, I decide that I need to find a better job than working in a comic bookstore so I take myself off to the local unemployment office and emerge with directions to a neighborhood of older wood frame homes, one of which houses a sensory isolation tank business run by a thirty-something couple named Jim and Star. I had read about sensory isolation tanks while in graduate school, and the reports on the effects of floating in such tanks often describe psychotic-like reactions in the subjects. But it is a possible job connected with psychology, something better than working in a comic book store, so I go over to check it out. After talking with Jim I decide to give it a try. My job is to sell sensory isolation tanks.

One thing leads to another and after a couple of weeks I find myself regularly floating in the tanks and getting a real feel for the effects of it. I find the experience strange and fascinating, and believe that it can have some interesting benefits. I feel I am into something here that is psychologically enlightening, if not philosophical and metaphysical. This is something different. There is a sense of adventure in it all, and that’s what I’m looking for, that sense of adventure.

But if I reflected on it more, I would have to admit that over the previous year or so my reason has taken a holiday. I have been making one stupid mistake after another and each time I walk off a cliff or slide down some slippery slope, I do it knowing in my gut that what I am doing isn’t the right way to go. The captain – the ego – or my sense of conscience (as the case may be) has lost control of the ship.

(And though the tanks offer Nirvana and enlightenment, the mind falls apart within them. You start talking to yourself. Chaos and confusion enters into your consciousness.)

And there is more. Right off the bat, it hits me that there is an ominous quality to Jim and Star. The first night I am there I witness one of the employees get belittled and screamed at in front of everyone else. (What, am I stupid? Why do I stay?) Another time several employees suddenly quit without notice and disappear. Why don’t I connect this to the way Star’s face turns fiery red when she is yelling at one of the employees? (Right from the start, I can sense this anger, this distrust in her; is it just toward me?) And why don’t I question the sanity of the place when Jim begins to call meetings for everyone late on Sunday nights, when I notice that the employees are almost all passive, intimidated, and compliant? I am in a place for stray dogs who will do anything for food and shelter, and I am one of them. Perhaps underneath I do see all of this – and draw the appropriate conclusions – but I am pulled into something so quickly I don’t have the wits to get out of it.

I think that early on a sense of moral obligation is instilled in me that now - as the doubts and concerns accumulate in my mind - works against my leaving.

After so many mistakes, I feel that I am supposed to keep at it and succeed at this new job. Jim and Star play on this sense of responsibility and commitment, with me and the others. On top of that, and in my skewed thinking, I fear that backing out would make me a coward. And, then Jim treats me as special, as someone intelligent whom he can discuss important ideas with, as someone who is not going to be treated the same way others in the place are treated. What a sucker I am.

It also seems to me that they can “see” into things, including seeing into me. (This is part of the message they reinforce.) They are gurus. I am drawn or captured by this. My life is a mess. I am distressed. My plans have fallen apart. And so I am vulnerable and weak. Underneath I don’t feel very good about myself and they see this and play on it. Jim, off and on, makes comments about me, about my life and my personality. Is he right about these observations or not? I start to wonder. I start to doubt myself. Does he understand me better than I do?

In essence, they get to me the same way they get to so many other people in the place. It only takes a little over two weeks. Following the usual pattern, from early on Jim quickly draws me into conversations about my life in which I am encouraged to reveal my goals, my experiences, and my problems and hang-ups. They all want to get to know me, they explain. We sit around, mostly Jim and I, and smoke pot and philosophize about life. I think that Jim is smart, but sometimes smart is a weapon rather than a source of nurturance. Presumably, this is a place where one can evolve psychologically, where there are caring friends and kindred minds. That is part of the promise. The sensory isolation tanks are a tool to be used toward increasing self-awareness and enlightenment; it is part of the whole process; that is the story. Of course I tell them about Lisa and they say that they want to help her too.

In conjunction with all of this, I float in the tanks everyday. The tanks relax you – bring you down into alpha – bring you into a state that is easy to condition. Your identity melts and evaporates into the air.

Then one day, I start to question something Jim says in a presentation he has just finished (thinking to myself that I could do it much better). I am rather hesitant about being too critical, but he starts to push, wanting to know exactly what I think. I try to evade and get out of the discussion. Somehow, though, I find myself in the middle of an encounter group that seems to spontaneously emerge out of the blue. Perhaps I have threatened him, challenging his authority. Perhaps he is pissed because I don’t spit out what I am thinking. Whatever it is, I find myself the focus of an onslaught, with other members of the group getting into it as well. It is the very thing I have seen happening to others before.

Later, I realize that this is their way of establishing and maintaining power in the group, a baboon kind of power. Beat everyone up at one time or another and make sure everyone - when they are not the victim - participates in the beatings of others.

Circling around me like wolves, they tell me that I won’t take responsibility for my life. They tell me that I am dishonest and a coward. They tell me I can’t make a commitment. They tell me that although I pretend to be a good

person, I'm not. I am a bastard. (This one really bothers me.) They tell me that I have bitten off more than I can chew. (Another point that really bothers me.) I pace around the room, getting more upset, more confused, and find myself emotionally crumbling in front of all these strange people. My intellect seems to dysfunction; to go around in circles; to go off on tangents; to dodge this way and that. And they comment on this like sadistic clinicians analyzing a particularly bad psychotic state in one of their patients. I feel trapped. I find the experience totally unnerving. But they have succeeded in whatever perverse objective they have. They have frightened the hell out of me, humiliated me, and I feel absolutely terrible about myself.

But for some stupid reason, I come back again the next day. Again I believe it is to follow through and not cave in, but my nerves are still very shaky from the night before and they start back up again. A couple of days earlier I had given Jim a copy of *Behold the Man* to read. In the middle of this new onslaught he picks up the book off his desk and throws it down on the floor and tells me it is trash; it is sick, it is neurotic, etc. etc. I think to myself that there is something about the book that really touches a nerve – that really upsets him – but his point at the time is clearly to reject and belittle a symbol of what I stand for.

And now I think to myself that I just have to get out of here. I don't want to talk to them anymore. I just want to leave. I tell them that I've had it and that I am quitting, which provokes an escalation of the verbal attacks. What am I going to do, they ask? (Who are these strange, fucking people I have let into my life?) Run back to Indiana? Run back to Lisa? They tell me that if I leave I will carry the defeat and humiliation with me. I can't run away from it. They tell me that I am dooming myself, dooming my future. They have gotten into my head; let's say more precisely that I have let them, and now they are throwing it all back at me. I just want to leave and get away from them.

Somehow I break away and make it out of the house. As I walk across the snow covered front yard they just keep yelling. Jim follows me out, trying to physically provoke me, grabbing my jacket, heaping more abuse. This is too much; too much analysis; too much thinking and delving into things; too much manipulation. My mind recoils from it and goes dead. When I finally make it to the car and drive away, I feel like I have been beaten up.

I drive like hell to get away from there, to get as far away from the hell hole as fast as I can. Though I feel totally demoralized and shaken by the experience, I think that at least Lisa has been spared. If Lisa had come out, they would have eaten her alive, I think. She is pregnant and God knows what would have happened. I feel a knot in my stomach when I remember the story they told of a woman who had come out to their place pregnant and ended up having some kind of spontaneous, stress-induced abortion. It gives me some comfort afterward to think that I probably saved my son's life by getting out of there.

Lessons come hard. The harder they come, perhaps the better they stick. One I learn from the isolation tank experience is to beware of people who always want to talk about your problems, but never theirs. Don't trust them. Don't go babbling about your life to strangers. There are dark souls in the world and they search for the darkness within you, or the weaknesses.

Demons attack when you try to pull free of their influence. That's how they hold you. On the way out the door, they blame you for everything to preserve their egos.

That night, after leaving the place, I walk around my apartment carrying a knife, peering out of the windows into the night. I don't think that I have ever felt so terrified in my life.

The next day I call Lisa and tell her I am coming back. I start packing up everything. In two days I am done. I call my parents for help and borrow some money from them. A moving truck comes the next day and everything is loaded up.

I drive down to Denver and stay overnight with Frankie. I feel ashamed and my nerves are totally frazzled. It seems to me that Frankie has lost respect for me too. Am I projecting? At some point I go into the bathroom and throw up. There is this ugliness in my body that I need to purge. I feel a little better afterwards.

It is the beginning of December and the snow is coming down. I say goodbye to Frankie and head back down into the flat open plains of the Midwest toward Indiana. I feel depressed and disheartened and carry the whole nightmare back with me into the dark depths. I have fallen off the mountain.

Jim has done me a favor. (Or maybe it is God?)

* * * * *

For a while I feel that I don't want to think anymore, that I want to run away from the world of psychology, philosophy, and the realm of ideas. It is all too much. The experience with the sensory isolation tanks is the straw that breaks the camel's back. My intellect recoils against itself. I lose faith in my intellect. I lose faith (it had been coming) in the intellect itself.

I think that I just want to re-connect with Lisa, to feel love and comfort and companionship. I want to retreat back into the womb.

* * * * *

Marlo is a big black man. Around six foot three and two hundred thirty pounds, he wears thick gloves and a heavy white overcoat that hangs to his feet and is covered in grime and blood. He works in the frigid cold, in a storage and distribution center. It is a giant freezer warehouse. Every couple of weeks I come up and see him to pick up a load of frozen seafood and head back down to Indiana. The place stinks of frozen meat and frozen fish – tons and tons of frozen beef, cod, haddock, pork, catfish, perch, and squid.

Marlo and I talk. He is a friendly and pleasant soul. He is the foreman of the place and has been working in the warehouse for a long time. This is his life. He lives somewhere close by, I believe, in Chicago. We talk about the future. I tell him about myself, at least a bit, how I have a Ph.D. and used to be a college professor. But now I work in a fish market and drive the company truck to pick up frozen fish for the market in the big warehouses in Chicago. Marlo tells me that

there is hope for me; I have my degree and will find a way back into something better – a simple message indeed. He says, though, that for him this is it. He doesn't have much education and he will probably spend the rest of his working life in this big warehouse, monitoring the inventory, overseeing the arrival of shipments, supervising his work crew, and moving huge crates and boxes of frozen food on his forklift. He seems quite accepting of this. I admire him. But I wonder what he does when he goes home at night. Does he sit in front of the TV, watching sports and drinking beer? I wonder what brings joy and purpose into his life. Perhaps he is a wise man, a Zen master, who has found Nirvana amidst the frozen cod and perch.

After picking up my load, I drive back down on the interstate, leaving the crowded and noisy streets of Chicago for the bleak gray world of Indiana. Getting back to the fish market, I unload the boxes of frozen fish and seafood and help Louie, the owner, unpack and clean it all. The fish needs to be washed under cold water to thaw it out, and then it needs to be cut up and filleted. Louie has taught me how to filet fish and he teaches me about the different types of fish. I work in a long white coat soiled with blood, like Marlo. It is cold in the fish market. It is January and the back door is kept open to allow fresh air to come in and clear the place of the stench of fish which is forever present.

Louie is a small man, around sixty years of age. He walks hunched over and never smiles or laughs. He tells me that his plan for the future is to keep the fish market going till he reaches retirement age at sixty-five. Then he will retire, hoping to have a least one or two years where he can relax and, of all things, go fishing before he dies. God - does that sound depressing to me. But Louie gives me a job when I am down and out, though it seems to him (quite rightly so) that I would hardly want to work in a fish market with a Ph.D. in psychology. He doesn't think I will last. God knows how I convince him that I can see some kind of career working in the place. I guess I believe I want to escape from the world of ideas.

One night, after the market has closed, I head out to the parking lot to get my car and drive home. Paul, an old faculty friend of mine from the college I taught at in Indiana, is waiting outside to chat with me for a few moments. Perhaps Paul feels sorry for me, for we get together every so often to talk and maybe have a cup of coffee. That night I am down (as usual) and going over again, for the umpteenth time, how I got myself into the present situation. A year before I was a college professor; six months earlier I was heading out to Colorado, to this romantic adventure amidst the Rockies, to write science fiction stories. Where am I now? Frozen, like the fish, filleting perch in some God forsaken strip mall back in Indiana. Paul says that maybe I am paying for some really big sins.

And of course, being the good Catholic that I am down deep in my psyche, in spite of my professed philosophical emancipation from religion on the conscious, intellectual level, I get to thinking – get to obsessing - on what the sins are that I am paying for. I think to myself that I should have paid more attention to Laura and our children; I should have appreciated what I had, that someone really loved me, yet I had thrown it away. I shouldn't have paid so much attention to the world of books.

Or, as another angle on things, instead of becoming unfocused, unsettled, and loose in my behavior after the divorce, chasing after women, etc. etc., I should have concentrated on my job and my academic career. I let my job go to hell.

And I shouldn't have had sex with my students. I feel like I compromised my integrity as an educator. I participated in this life of debauchery and was never really serious about any of them. I am paying for my sins.

I also think that I should have listened to my common sense and not taken Lisa with me to Colorado. I feel guilty about that as well. I helped her to run away from home, from her parents, a bad move indeed. And, of course, her parents followed us, via phone, letters, and a constant haunting in Lisa's mind, out to Colorado. One can't have a relationship – married or otherwise - where the parents are in the middle of everything.

And I ran away from Colorado with my tail between my legs, the icing on this ugly cake.

Of course, these are all "should and shouldn't haves" – nuggets of wisdom in hindsight – and on every one of these points of guilt and regret, there is another side to the coin, other points I could remind myself of, but I am in a deep mental funk now, blaming myself – blaming others – blaming, blaming, blaming - for all the misfortunes I have encountered over the last six months.

I head home to the small apartment that Lisa and I live in. All of the beautiful things I have accumulated are mostly gone or put away now. I sold a lot of my books in Colorado to get some quick money when we were going broke. Most of the rest of my books are in boxes. I also sold my beautiful stereo system for the same reason; I still have my classical albums but nothing to play them on. My art work is all rolled up and disassembled. Lisa never liked my crazy art anyway, and she told me that her parents especially found it offensive. Much of my furniture is gone. The apartment is stark, bleak, and empty of life, mirroring the state of my soul. This is not the color or feel of a Dionysian adventure; of a Pirsig-inspired embrace of quality; of a breaking free of the conservative normalcy of middle class existence; of an existential, science fiction, metaphysical excursion into enlightenment. This is death. This is a dark gray fog, the true Ganzfeld of the mind and the human spirit.

At times I get angry at Lisa. I explode and start yelling at her. I am carrying the emotional wounds of my bad ending in Colorado. At times I fear that I am perversely replaying the verbal cruelty inflicted on me by Jim and Star but part of me also blames her for the depressing mess we are in now. I told her that I was heading out west to create a new kind of life. She is the one whose ambivalence began to poison it. To make things worse, she won't talk to me much. God knows what she thinks about where we are supposed to go from here. I try to share my thoughts and feelings and she sits there mute. Instead of talking to me she talks to her mother, the very person whom, just six months before, she had run away from. She is pregnant and is concerned about money, about my having a job to support our family.

But I'm not thinking about money. Aside from all the regrets and intermittent guilt trips that I lay both on myself and on her, I am thinking that my

passion in life was ideas and scholarship and teaching, and that I threw it all away. I even came to the point of rejecting it, and now I am miserable and thoroughly deflated being disconnected from that way of life. Though I wanted to go out and experience the “real world,” what was I thinking when I left teaching and when I left the library? Didn’t I remember Waterbury? But I was off chasing Harmony, looking for the other side of enlightenment.

Is this the other side, the other part that I need to comprehend? If it is it doesn’t feel very good.

I am also thinking that there is some kind of disconnect between all of my knowledge and how I have been recently leading my life. What I have studied should have relevance and benefit to life; it should help me to create a life of quality, but instead I find myself in a fish market in Indiana, broke and demoralized. I keep thinking, if I am so smart, then why is my life in such a mess? Again, the thought goes through my mind, that the intellect is defective or worse, that I am defective as an intellectual and scholar – very bad thoughts indeed.

Or was this somehow the absolutely right thing to have occurred? Is this what was needed? Leaving Laura; the abandonment of sense and propriety; the rejection of God in the snowstorm; the Dionysian flight into sex and drugs and rock n’ roll; the multiple encounters with evil; losing myself and coming unglued; feeling the sting of insults to the ego and getting nailed to the Cross; getting dizzy in the Rockies and falling off the peaks, rolling all the way back to the Midwest; losing my true passion and love; getting lost in the gibberish of “The Library of Babel”; chasing after Harmony; feeling first hand the drama and pathos and tragedy of life. It is like I am in some kind of strange novel, again, in some sort of alternate reality.

But then where do I go from here? What, in fact, is the next chapter in the book?