

# energeia



spring 2014

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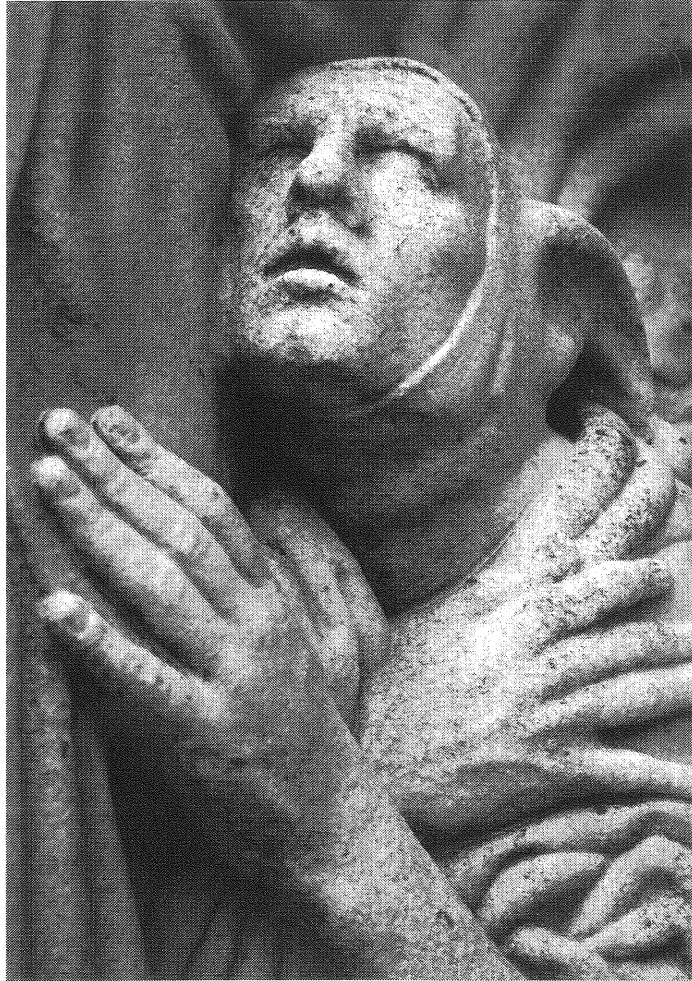
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Then they for sudden joy did weep,  
and I for sorrow sung / *Peggy Bair*

## Center

*Peter Kalkavage*

“Abandon all hope, you who enter here!”

Thus the precise pit of fallen souls  
Precipitates the pilgrim’s fear  
That none flee whom pride controls,  
Whom lust for flight constrains.

Amour-propre reigns:

Self-ravishing,

Now ravaged,

Icy

I.

## Funes el Memorioso

*Jorge Luis Borges*

Lo recuerdo (yo no tengo derecho a pronunciar ese verbo sagrado, sólo un hombre en la tierra tuvo derecho y ese hombre ha muerto) con una oscura pasionaria en la mano, viéndola como nadie la ha visto, aunque la mirara desde el crepúsculo del día hasta el de la noche, toda una vida entera. Lo recuerdo, la cara taciturna y aindiada y singularmente *remota*, detrás del cigarrillo. Recuerdo (creo) sus manos afiladas de trenzador. Recuerdo cerca de esas manos un mate, con las armas de la Banda Oriental; recuerdo en la ventana de la casa una estera amarilla, con un vago paisaje lacustre. Recuerdo claramente su voz; la voz pausada, resentida y nasal del orillero antiguo, sin los silbidos italianos de ahora. Más de tres veces no lo vi; la última, en 1887... Me parece muy feliz el proyecto de que todos aquellos que lo trataron escriban sobre él; mi testimonio será acaso el más breve y sin duda el más pobre, pero no el menos imparcial del volumen que editarán ustedes. Mi deplorable condición de argentino me impedirá incurrir en el ditirambo — género obligatorio en el Uruguay, cuando el tema es un uruguayo. *Literato, cajetilla, porteño*; Funes no dijo esas injuriosas palabras, pero de un modo suficiente me consta que yo representaba para él esas desventuras. Pedro Leandro Ipuche ha escrito que Funes era un precursor de los superhombres; “Un Zarathustra cimarrón y vernáculo”: no lo discuto,

## Funes the Memorious

*translated by Jim Fackino*

I remember him (I have no right to pronounce that sacred verb, only one man on earth had the right and that man is dead) with a dark passionflower in hand, seeing it as no one has seen it, though he might look at it from the twilight of day till that of night, a whole lifetime. I remember him, the taciturn and Indian-like and singularly *remote* face, behind the cigarette. I remember (I believe) his slender leather-braider's hands. I remember near those hands a maté with the coat of arms of the Banda Oriental; I remember in the window of the house a yellow mat, with a vague lacustrine landscape. I remember clearly his voice; the slow, resentful, and nasal voice of the old working-class man who dwelt on the outskirts, without the Italian sibilants of nowadays. I saw him no more than three times; the last, in 1887... That all those who dealt with him should write about him seems to me a very happy project; my testimony will be perhaps the briefest and without a doubt the poorest, but not the least impartial of the volume that you will publish. My deplorable Argentine condition will impede me from falling into dithyramb — an obligatory genre in Uruguay, when the theme is an Uruguayan. *Littérateur, city-slicker, port-man*; Funes did not say those injurious words, but I am sufficiently certain that for him I represented those misfortunes. Pedro Leandro Ipuche has written that Funes was

pero no hay que olvidar que era también un compadrito de Fray Bentos, con ciertas incurables limitaciones.

Mi primer recuerdo de Funes es muy perspicuo. Lo veo en un atardecer de marzo o febrero del año ochenta y cuatro. Mi padre, ese año, me había llevado a veranear a Fray Bentos. Yo volvía con mi primo Bernardo Haedo de la estancia de San Francisco. Volvíamos cantando, a caballo, y ésa no era la única circunstancia de mi felicidad. Después de un día bochornoso, una enorme tormenta color pizarra había escondido el cielo. La alentaba el viento del Sur, ya se enloquecían los árboles; yo tenía el temor (la esperanza) de que nos sorprendiera en un descampado el agua elemental. Corrimos una especie de carrera con la tormenta. Entramos en un callejón que se ahondaba entre dos veredas altísimas de ladrillo. Había oscurecido de golpe; oí rápidos y casi secretos pasos en lo alto; alcé los ojos y vi un muchacho que corría por la estrecha y rota vereda como por una estrecha y rota pared. Recuerdo la bombacha, las alpargatas, recuerdo el cigarrillo en el duro rostro, contra el nubarrón ya sin límites. Bernardo le gritó imprevisiblemente: *¿Qué horas son, Ireneo?* Sin consultar el cielo, sin detenerse, el otro respondió: *Faltan cuatro minutos para las ocho, joven Bernardo Juan Francisco.* La voz era aguda, burlona.

a precursor of the supermen, "an untamed and vernacular Zarathustra"; I do not dispute it, but one must not forget that he was also a young tough from Fray Bentos, with certain incurable limitations.

My first memory of Funes is very perspicuous. I see him on an evening at dusk in March or February of eighty-four. My father, that year, had taken me to spend the summer in Fray Bentos. I was coming back from the San Francisco ranch with my cousin Bernardo Haedo. We came back singing, on horseback, and that was not the only circumstance of my happiness. After a sultry day, an enormous slate-colored storm had hidden the sky. It was inspired by the South wind, the trees were already going mad; I had the fear (the hope) that the elemental water would surprise us in an open field. We ran a kind of race with the storm. We entered an alley that went deep between two very high footpaths of brick. It had gotten dark all of a sudden; I heard rapid and almost secret steps on high; I lifted my eyes and saw a boy who was running along a narrow and broken footpath as if along a narrow and broken wall. I remember the loose gaucho trousers, the rope-soled sandals; I remember the cigarette in his hard face, against the already limitless storm cloud. Unforeseeably, Bernardo shouted out to him: *What's the time, Ireneo?* Without consulting the sky, without stopping, the other responded: *Four minutes left until eight, young Bernardo Juan Francisco.* The voice was sharp, mocking.



Yo soy tan distraído que el diálogo que acabo de referir no me hubiera llamado la atención si no lo hubiera recalcado mi primo, a quien estimulaban (creo) cierto orgullo local, y el deseo de mostrarse indiferente a la réplica tripartita del otro.

Me dijo que el muchacho del callejón era un tal Ireneo Funes, mentado por algunas rarezas como la de no darse con nadie y la de saber siempre la hora, como un reloj. Agregó que era hijo de una planchadora del pueblo, María Clementina Funes, y que algunos decían que su padre era un médico del saladero, un inglés O'Connor, y otros un domador o rastreador del departamento del Salto. Vivía con su madre, a la vuelta de la quinta de los Laureles.

Los años ochenta y cinco y ochenta y seis veraneamos en la ciudad de Montevideo. El ochenta y siete volví a Fray Bentos. Pregunté, como es natural, por todos los conocidos y, finalmente, por el "cronométrico Funes." Me contestaron que lo había volteado un redomón en la estancia de San Francisco, y que había quedado tullido, sin esperanza. Recuerdo la impresión de incómoda magia que la noticia me produjo; la única vez que yo lo vi, veníamos a caballo de San Francisco y él andaba en un lugar alto; el hecho, en boca de mi primo Bernardo, tenía mucho de sueño elaborado con elementos anteriores. Me dijeron que no se movía del catre, puestos los ojos en la higuera del fondo o en una telaraña. En los atardeceres, permitía que lo sacaran a la ventana. Llevaba la soberbia hasta el punto de simular que

I am so distracted that the dialogue I have just related would not have called my attention had it not been emphasized by my cousin, who was stimulated (I believe) by a certain local pride, and by the desire to show that he was indifferent to the other's tripartite reply.

He told me that the boy from the alley was one Ireneo Funes, oft-mentioned for a few oddities such as that of involving himself with no one and of always knowing the time, like a clock. He added that he was the son of an ironing-woman in town, María Clementina Funes, and that some used to say his father was a doctor at the meat-salting house, an Englishman named O'Connor, and others a horse-breaker or a scout from the Salto Department. He lived with his mother, right around the country house of the Laurels.

The years eighty-five and eighty-six we spent the summer in the city of Montevideo. In eighty-seven I returned to Fray Bentos. I asked, as is natural, about all my acquaintances and, finally, about the "chronometric Funes." They told me that a half-broken horse had overturned him on the San Francisco ranch, and that he had remained crippled, without hope. I remember the impression of uneasy magic the news produced in me: the only time I saw him, we were coming on horseback from San Francisco and he was running on a high place; the fact, in the mouth of my cousin Bernardo, felt much like a dream elaborated with anterior elements. They told me he did not move from his cot, his eyes fixed on the fig tree in the back or on a cobweb. In the evenings, at



era benéfico el golpe que lo había fulminado... Dos veces lo vi atrás de la reja, que burdamente recalca su condición de eterno prisionero: una, inmóvil, con los ojos cerrados; otra, inmóvil también, absorto en la contemplación de un oloroso gajo de santonina.

No sin alguna vanagloria yo había iniciado en aquel tiempo el estudio metódico del latín. Mi valija incluía el *De viris illustribus* de Lhomond, el *Thesaurus* de Quicherat, los comentarios de Julio César y un volumen impar de la *Naturalis historia* de Plinio, que excedía (y sigue excediendo) mis módicas virtudes de latinista. Todo se propala en un pueblo chico; Ireneo, en su rancho de las orillas, no tardó en enterarse del arribo de esos libros anómalos. Me dirigió una carta florida y ceremoniosa, en la que recordaba nuestro encuentro, desdichadamente fugaz, "del día siete de febrero del año ochenta y cuatro," ponderaba los gloriosos servicios que don Gregorio Haedo, mi tío, finado ese mismo año, "había prestado a las dos patrias en la valerosa jornada de Ituzaingó," y me solicitaba el préstamo de cualquiera de los volúmenes, acompañado de un diccionario "para la buena inteligencia del texto original, porque todavía ignoro el latín." Prometía devolverlos en buen estado, casi inmediatamente. La letra era perfecta, muy perfilada; la ortografía, del tipo que Andrés Bello preconizó: *i* por *y*, *j* por *g*. Al principio, temí naturalmente una broma. Mis primos me aseguraron que no, que eran cosas de Ireneo. No supe si atribuir a descaro, a ignorancia o a estupidez la idea de que el arduo latín no requería más instru-

dusk, he permitted that he be brought out to the window. He carried his pride up to the point of pretending that the sudden blow which had struck him down like lightning had been beneficial... Twice I saw him behind the iron grating, which crudely emphasized his condition as an eternal prisoner: once, motionless, with his eyes closed; another time, motionless as well, absorbed in the contemplation of a fragrant sprig of santonica.

Not without some vainglory, I had initiated at that time the methodical study of Latin. My valise included the *De viris illustribus* of Lhomond, the *Thesaurus* of Quicherat, the commentaries of Julius Caesar and an odd volume of the *Naturalis historia* by Pliny, which exceeded (and still exceeds) my moderate virtues as a Latinist. Everything becomes public in a small town; Ireneo, in his little house on the outskirts, was not long in finding out about the arrival of those anomalous books. He directed to me a flowery and ceremonious letter, in which he remembered our encounter, unfortunately fleeting, "on the seventh day of February of the year eighty-four," gave weighty praise to the glorious services that Don Gregorio Haedo, my uncle, deceased that same year, "had rendered to our two fatherlands in the valiant battle of Ituzaingó" and solicited the loan of any one of my volumes, accompanied by a dictionary "for the better intelligence of the original text, for I am as yet ignorant of Latin." He promised to return them in good condition, almost immediately. The handwriting was perfect, very finely profiled; the

mento que un diccionario; para desengañarlo con plenitud le mandé el *Gradus ad Parnassum*, de Quicherat, y la obra de Plinio.

El catorce de febrero me telegrafaron de Buenos Aires que volviera inmediatamente, porque mi padre no estaba "nada bien." Dios me perdone; el prestigio de ser el destinatario de un telegrama urgente, el deseo de comunicar a todo Fray Bentos la contradicción entre la forma negativa de la noticia y el perentorio adverbio, la tentación de dramatizar mi dolor, fingiendo un viril estoicismo, tal vez me distrajeron de toda posibilidad de dolor. Al hacer la valija, noté que me faltaban el *Gradus* y el primer tomo de la *Naturalis historia*. El *Saturno* zarpaba al día siguiente por la mañana; esa noche, después de cenar, me encaminé a casa de Funes. Me asombró que la noche fuera no menos pesada que el día.

En el decente rancho, la madre de Funes me recibió.

orthography, of the type that Andrés Bello favored: *i* for *y*, *j* for *g*. At first, I naturally feared a joke. My cousins assured me that no, these were the ways of Ireneo. I did not know whether to attribute to insolence, ignorance or stupidity the idea that the arduous Latin required no other instrument than a dictionary; to disabuse him fully I sent him the *Gradus ad Parnassum* of Quicherat, and the work by Pliny.

The fourteenth of February they telegraphed to me from Buenos Aires that I was to return immediately, for my father was "not at all well." God forgive me; the prestige of being the addressee of an urgent telegram, the desire to communicate to all of Fray Bentos the contradiction between the negative form of the news and the peremptory adverb, the temptation to dramatize my grief, feigning a virile stoicism, perhaps distracted me from all possibility of grief. While packing my valise, I noted that I was missing the *Gradus* and the first tome of the *Naturalis historia*. The *Saturn* was sailing the next day in the morning; that night, after supper, I set out on the road toward Funes' house. I was amazed to find the night no less heavy than the day had been.

At the honest little house, Funes' mother received me.

Me dijo que Ireneo estaba en la pieza del fondo y que no me extrañara encontrarla a oscuras, porque Ireneo sabía pasarse las horas muertas sin encender la vela. Atravesé el patio de baldosa, el corredorcito; llegué al segundo patio. Había una parra; la oscuridad pudo parecerme total. Oí de pronto la alta y burlona voz de Ireneo. Esa voz hablaba en latín; esa voz (que venía de la tiniebla) articulaba con moroso deleite un discurso o plegaria o incantación. Resonaron las sílabas romanas en el patio de tierra; mi temor las creía indecifrables, interminables; después, en el enorme diálogo de esa noche, supe que formaban el primer párrafo del vigésimocuarto capítulo del libro séptimo de la *Naturalis historia*. La materia de ese capítulo es la memoria; las palabras últimas fueron *ut nihil non iisdem verbis redderetur auditum*.

Sin el menor cambio de voz, Ireneo me dijo que pasara. Estaba en el catre, fumando. Me parece que no le vi la cara hasta el alba; creo recordar el ascua momentánea del cigarrillo. La pieza olía vagamente a humedad. Me senté; repetí la historia del telegrama y de la enfermedad de mi padre.

She told me Ireneo was in the back room and that I should not think it strange to find him in the dark, for he knew how to pass the dead hours without lighting the candle. I traversed the tile patio, the little corridor; I reached the second patio. There was a grapevine; the darkness seemed total to me. I suddenly heard the high and mocking voice of Ireneo. That voice was speaking in Latin; that voice (which came from the darkness) was articulating with lingering delight a speech or prayer or incantation. The Roman syllables resounded in the earthen patio; my fear believed them indecipherable, interminable; afterwards, in the enormous dialogue of that night, I learned that they were forming the first paragraph of the twenty-fourth chapter of the seventh book of the *Naturalis historia*. The subject of that chapter is memory; the last words were *ut nihil non iisdem verbis redderetur auditum* ["so that everything that has been heard can be given back in the same words." — Tr.]

Without the least change in voice, Ireneo told me to come in. He was on the cot, smoking. It seems to me I did not see his face until dawn; I believe I recall the momentary glow of the cigarette. The room smelled vaguely of dampness. I seated myself; I repeated the story about the telegram and my father's illness.

Arribo, ahora, al más difícil punto de mi relato. Éste (bueno es que ya lo sepa el lector) no tiene otro argumento que ese diálogo de hace ya medio siglo. No trataré de reproducir sus palabras, irre recuperables ahora. Prefiero resumir con veracidad las muchas cosas que me dijo Ireneo. El estilo indirecto es remoto y débil; yo sé que sacrifico la eficacia de mi relato; que mis lectores se imaginen los entrecortados períodos que me abrumaron esa noche.

Ireneo empezó por enumerar, en latín y español, los casos de memoria prodigiosa registrados por la *Naturalis historia*: Ciro, rey de los persas que sabía llamar por su nombre a todos los soldados de sus ejércitos; Mitrídates Eupator, que administraba la justicia en los 22 idiomas de su imperio; Simónides, inventor de la mnemotecnia; Metrodoro, que profesaba el arte de repetir con fidelidad lo escuchado una sola vez. Con evidente buena fe se maravilló de que tales casos maravillaran. Me dijo que antes de esa tarde lluviosa en que lo volteó el azulejo, él había sido lo que son todos los cristianos: un ciego, un sordo, un abom-bado, un desmemoriado. (Traté de recordarle su percepción exacta del tiempo, su memoria de nombres propios; no me hizo caso.) Diez y nueve años había vivido como quien sueña: miraba sin ver, oía sin oír, se olvidaba de todo, de casi todo. Al caer, perdió el conocimiento; cuando lo recobró, el presente era casi intolerable de tan rico y tan nítido, y también las memorias más antiguas y más triviales. Poco después averiguó que estaba tullido. El hecho apenas le interesó. Razonó (sintió) que la

I arrive, now, at the most difficult point in my narrative. This narrative (it is well that the reader already know it) has no other plot than that dialogue from already half a century ago. I will not try to reproduce his words, now irrecoverable. I prefer to summarize truthfully the many things that Ireneo told me. The indirect style is remote and weak; I know I am sacrificing the efficacy of my narrative; my readers are to imagine for themselves the broken up and intermittent periods which overwhelmed me that night.

Ireneo began by enumerating, in Latin and Spanish, the cases of prodigious memory recorded in the *Naturalis historia*: Cyrus, king of the Persians, who could call every soldier in his armies by name; Mithridates Eupator, who administered justice in the 22 languages of his empire; Simonides, inventor of mnemotechny; Metrodorus, who professed the art of repeating with fidelity what he had heard only once. With evident good faith he wondered that such cases be considered wondrous. He told me that before that rainy afternoon when the blue roan overturned him, he had been what every Christian is: a blind, deaf, stunned, memoryless person. (I tried to remind him of his exact perception of time, his memory for proper names; he paid no attention to me.) For nineteen years he had lived as one who dreams: he looked without seeing, listened without hearing, forgot everything, almost everything. When he fell, he lost consciousness; when he recovered, the present was almost intolerable, so rich and so bright, and his most ancient and most trivial memories as well.

inmovilidad era un precio mínimo. Ahora su percepción y su memoria eran infalibles.

Nosotros, de un vistazo, percibimos tres copas en una mesa; Funes, todos los vástagos y racimos y frutos que comprende una parra. Sabía las formas de las nubes australes del amanecer del treinta de abril de mil ochocientos ochenta y dos y podía compararlas en el recuerdo con las vetas de un libro en pasta española que sólo había mirado una vez y con las líneas de la espuma que un remo levantó en el Río Negro la víspera de la acción del Quebracho. Esos recuerdos no eran simples; cada imagen visual estaba ligada a sensaciones musculares, térmicas, etc. Podía reconstruir todos los sueños, todos los entresueños. Dos o tres veces había reconstruido un día entero; no había dudado nunca, pero cada reconstrucción había requerido un día entero. Me dijo: *Más recuerdos tengo yo solo que los que habrán tenido todos los hombres desde que el mundo es mundo.* Y también: *Mis sueños son como la vigilia de ustedes.* Y también, hacia el alba: *Mi memoria, señor, es como vaciadero de basuras.* Una circunferencia en un pizarrón, un triángulo rectángulo, un rombo, son formas que podemos intuir plenamente; lo mismo le pasaba a Irene con las aborascadas crines de un potro, con una punta de ganado en unacuchilla, con el fuego cambiante y con la innumerable ceniza, con las muchas caras de un muerto en un largo velorio. No sé cuántas estrellas veía en el cielo.

A little later he found out that he was crippled. The fact hardly interested him. He reasoned (he felt) that the immobility was a minimal price. Now his perception and his memory were infallible.

We, in one glance, perceive three wine glasses on a table; Funes, all the shoots and clusters and fruits that a grapevine comprehends. He knew the forms of the austral clouds at daybreak on the thirtieth of April in eighteen eighty-two, and he could compare them in his memory with the mottled streaks of a book bound in Spanish leather which he had looked at only once, and with the lines in the foam raised by an oar in the Río Negro the eve of the Quebracho action. Those memories were not simple; each visual image was linked to muscular sensations, thermal sensations, etc. He could reconstruct all his dreams, all his half-dreams. Two or three times he had reconstructed an entire day; he never hesitated, but each reconstruction had required an entire day. He told me: *I alone have more memories than all men will have had since the world was a world.* And also: *My dreams are like your waking hours.* And also, toward dawn: *My memory, sir, is like a garbage heap.* A circumference on a blackboard, a right triangle, a rhomb, are forms we can fully intuit; the same went for Irene with the stormy mane of a young colt, with a small herd of cattle on a mountain ridge, with the changing fire and its innumerable ashes, with the many faces of a dead person at a long wake. I do not know how many stars he used to see in the sky.

Esas cosas me dijo; ni entonces ni después las he puesto en duda. En aquel tiempo no había cinematógrafos ni fonógrafos; es, sin embargo, inverosímil y hasta increíble que nadie hiciera un experimento con Funes. Lo cierto es que vivimos postergando todo lo postergable; tal vez todos sabemos profundamente que somos inmortales y que tarde o temprano, todo hombre hará todas las cosas y sabrá todo.

La voz de Funes, desde la oscuridad, seguía hablando.

Me dijo que hacia 1886 había discurrido un sistema original de numeración y que en muy pocos días había rebasado el veinticuatro mil. No lo había escrito, porque lo pensado una sola vez ya no podía borrarse. Su primer estímulo, creo, fue el desagrado de que los treinta y tres orientales requirieran dos signos y tres palabras, en lugar de una sola palabra y un solo signo. Aplicó luego ese disparatado principio a los otros números. En lugar de siete mil trece, decía (por ejemplo) *Máximo Pérez*; en lugar de siete mil catorce, *El Ferrocarril*; otros números eran *Luis Melián Lafinur*, *Olimar*, *azufre*, *los bastos*, *la ballena*, *el gas*, *la caldera*, *Napoleón*, *Agustín de Vedia*. En lugar de quinientos, decía *nueve*. Cada palabra tenía un signo particular, una especie de marca; las últimas eran muy complicadas... Yo traté de explicarle que esa rapsodia de voces inconexas era precisamente lo contrario de un sistema de numeración. Le dije que decir 365 era decir tres centenas, seis decenas, cinco unidades; análisis que no existe en los "números" *El Negro Timoteo* o *manta de carne*. Funes no me en-

Those things he told me; neither then nor later have I put them in doubt. In that time there were no cinematographs or phonographs; nevertheless, it is unlikely and even incredible that no one should have done an experiment with Funes. It is certain that we live our lives postponing all that is postponable. Perhaps we all know deep down that we are immortal and that sooner or later, every man will do all things and know everything.

The voice of Funes, from the darkness, continued speaking.

He told me that toward 1886 he had devised an original system of numeration and that in very few days he had surpassed the twenty-four thousandth numeral. He had not written it down, for what was thought only once could no longer be erased from him. His first stimulus, I believe, was his displeasure at the fact that the Thirty-Three Orientals should require two signs and three words, instead of a single word and a single sign. He then applied that absurd principle to the other numbers. In place of seven thousand thirteen, he said (for example) *Máximo Pérez*; in place of seven thousand fourteen, *The Railway*; other numbers were *Luis Melián Lafinur*, *Olimar*, *sulfur*, *clubs*, *the whale*, *gas*, *the kettle*, *Napoleon*, *Agustín de Vedia*. In place of five hundred, he said *nine*. Each word had a particular sign, a kind of mark; the last were very complicated... I tried to explain to him that this rhapsody of unconnected vocalizations was precisely the contrary of a system of numeration. I told him that to say 365 was to say three hun-

tendió o no quiso entenderme.

Locke, en el siglo XVII, postuló (y reprobó) un idioma imposible en el que cada cosa individual, cada piedra, cada pájaro y cada rama tuviera un nombre propio; Funes proyectó alguna vez un idioma análogo, pero lo desechó por parecerle demasiado general, demasiado ambiguo. En efecto, Funes no sólo recordaba cada hoja de cada árbol, de cada monte, sino cada una de las veces que la había percibido o imaginado. Resolvió reducir cada una de sus jornadas pretéritas, a unos setenta mil recuerdos, que definiría luego por cifras. Lo disuadieron dos consideraciones: la conciencia de que la tarea era interminable, la conciencia de que era inútil. Pensó que en la hora de la muerte no habría acabado aún de clasificar todos los recuerdos de la niñez.

Los dos proyectos que he indicado (un vocabulario infinito para la serie natural de los números, un inútil catálogo mental de todas las imágenes del recuerdo) son insensatos, pero revelan cierta balbuciente grandeza. Nos dejan vislumbrar o inferir el vertiginoso mundo de Funes. Éste, no lo olvidemos, era casi incapaz de ideas generales, platónicas. No sólo le costaba comprender que el símbolo genérico *perro* abarcara tantos individuos dispares de diversos tamaños y diversa forma; le molestaba que el perro de las tres y catorce (visto de perfil) tuviera el mismo nombre que el perro de las tres y cuarto (visto de frente). Su propia cara en el espejo, sus propias manos, lo sorprendían cada vez. Refiere Swift que el emperador de Lilliput discernía el movimiento del mi-

dreds, six tens, five units; analysis which does not exist in the "numbers" *Negro Timoteo* or *meat-mantle*. Funes did not understand me, or did not want to understand me.

Locke, in the XVIIth century, postulated (and rejected) an impossible language in which each individual thing, each stone, each bird and each branch would have its own name; Funes at some time projected an analogous language, but discarded it for seeming too general, too ambiguous, to him. In fact, Funes not only remembered each leaf of each tree, of each wood, but each one of the times he had perceived or imagined it. He resolved to reduce each one of his bygone days to some seventy thousand memories, which he would then define by ciphers. He was dissuaded by two considerations: the awareness that the task was interminable, the awareness that it was useless. He thought that by the hour of his death he still would not have finished classifying all of the memories from childhood.

The two projects I have indicated (an infinite vocabulary for the natural series of numbers, a useless mental catalog of all the images of his memory) are senseless, but bring into relief a certain stammering grandeur. They let us glimpse or infer the vertiginous world of Funes. He was, let us not forget it, almost incapable of general, Platonic ideas. Not only was it hard for him to comprehend that the generic symbol *dog* should embrace so many disparate individuals of diverse sizes and diverse form; it bothered him that the dog of three fourteen (seen in profile) should have



nutero; Funes discernía continuamente los tranquilos avances de la corrupción, de las caries, de la fatiga. Notaba los progresos de la muerte, de la humedad. Era el solitario y lúcido espectador de un mundo multiforme, instantáneo y casi intolerablemente preciso. Babilonia, Londres y Nueva York han abrumado con feroz esplendor la imaginación de los hombres; nadie, en sus torres populosas o en sus avenidas urgentes, ha sentido el calor y la presión de una realidad tan infatigable como la que día y noche convergía sobre el infeliz Ireneo, en su pobre arrabal sudamericano. Le era muy difícil dormir. Dormir es distraerse del mundo; Funes, de espaldas en el catre, en la sombra, se figuraba cada grieta y cada moldura de las casas precisas que lo rodeaban. (Repito que el menos importante de sus recuerdos era más minucioso y más vivo que nuestra percepción de un goce físico o de un tormento físico.) Hacia el Este, en un trecho no amanzanado, había casas nuevas, desconocidas. Funes las imaginaba negras, compactas, hechas de tiniebla homogénea; en esa dirección volvía la cara para dormir. También solía imaginarse en el fondo del río, mecido y anulado por la corriente.

the same name as the dog of quarter after three (seen from the front). His own face in the mirror, his own hands, surprised him every time. Swift relates that the emperor of Lilliput discerned the movement of the minute hand; Funes continually discerned the quiet advances of corruption, of caries, of fatigue. He noted the progresses of death, of dampness. He was the solitary and lucid spectator of a multiform, instantaneous and almost intolerably precise world. Babylon, London and New York have overwhelmed the imagination of men with their ferocious splendor; no one, in their populous towers or on their urgent avenues, has felt the heat and the pressure of a reality as indefatigable as that which day and night converged upon the unhappy Ireneo, in his poor South American suburb. It was very difficult for him to sleep. To sleep is to be distracted from the world; Funes, on his back on his cot, in the shadows, visualized the figure of each crevice and each molding of the precise houses that surrounded him. (I repeat that the least important of his memories was more minutely detailed and more lively than our perception of a physical pleasure or a physical torment.) Toward the East, on a stretch not yet divided into blocks, there were new, unknown houses. Funes imagined them black, compact, made of homogeneous darkness; he turned his face in that direction in order to sleep. He was also wont to imagine himself at the bottom of the river, rocked and annihilated by the current.

Había aprendido sin esfuerzo el inglés, el francés, el portugués, el latín. Sospecho, sin embargo que no era muy capaz de pensar. Pensar es olvidar diferencias, es generalizar, abstraer. En el abarrotado mundo de Funes no había sino detalles, casi inmediatos.

La recelosa claridad de la madrugada entró por el patio de tierra.

Entonces vi la cara de la voz que toda la noche había hablado. Ireneo tenía diecinueve años; había nacido en 1868; me pareció monumental como el bronce, más antiguo que Egipto, anterior a las profecías y a las pirámides. Pensé que cada una de mis palabras (que cada uno de mis gestos) perduraría en su implacable memoria; me entorpeció el temor de multiplicar ademanes inútiles.

Ireneo Funes murió en 1889, de una congestión pulmonar.

Without effort, he had learned English, French, Portuguese, Latin. I suspect, nevertheless, that he was not very capable of thinking. To think is to forget differences, it is to generalize, to abstract. In the overcrowded world of Funes there were nothing but details, almost immediate.

The wary clarity of the early morning entered along the earthen patio.

Then I saw the face of the voice that had spoken all night. Ireneo was nineteen years old; he had been born in 1868; he seemed to me monumental like bronze, more ancient than Egypt, anterior to the prophecies and the pyramids. I thought how each one of my words (how each one of my gestures) would endure in his implacable memory; I was benumbed by the fear of multiplying useless gestures.

Ireneo Funes died in 1889, of a pulmonary congestion.

Alighted on a roof in  
State Circle

*Casey Morris*

After a soft twitch, remade in silence,  
her glare unmuddied in the mezzanine,  
unwearied on the thatch, trefoil wings  
tempt to beat the pub smoke into kindness.  
And the cinched umbrellas before the stoop,  
the crimson bricks, iron swirled into chairs  
and buzzing tables, buzzed waiters,  
    chess players,  
bald, crimpy senators ordering soup  
and sipping cloudy decaf, these are cast  
in momentary doubt: her vulpine vane,  
distended breast puffed to blow steel and fast,  
blaring beryl down, opens like split grain  
and they turn to see her pilot breakfast  
before panning out at School St. and Main.

Delta Flight 6393

*Connor Callahan*

Re-routed through Michigan,  
sent back too early  
to an ancient home.

Covered all in snow,  
all caused to slow halt-  
stop by impressible,  
blanketing snow.

The flakes open up gaps  
in my day of travel,  
stretching it with the static,  
crystalline clean-dirty, clear  
snow of Detroit, oddly twinkling.

Cocooned in alum,  
emergency emergent on  
my sinister side, some  
thirty odd souls bear  
toward Rochester.

I reconstruct my  
pioneering youth,  
set out once more  
from hostile land for  
some new hearth,

but the trail is no longer  
solid and sunny, but  
cold and celestial,  
more suited for  
my age, my temper.

This odyssey sleeps  
not so well at night,  
pushing on, pushing  
on edges still sharp.

Flashes now, no glows,  
move quick while motion  
yet means naught, then beg  
Zenetic against the tide of time.

## Biblical Imagery in Wallace Stevens' "A Weak Mind in the Mountains"

*Robert George*

*"If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and  
throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your  
members than for your whole body to go into hell."*

*Matthew 5:30*

This command of Jesus teaches that man's nature is dual and warring. It assumes that we are imperfect wholes made up of irreconcilable parts. It is not enough, we are told, to be concerned only with our actions in social contexts while ignoring the character of our internal dialogues. Such a focus on the quality of man's inner life is laudable, but it severs man from himself. Half of man becomes that which thinks sinfully and attempts to drag the whole man into sin; the other half becomes that which is now commanded to cut off the offending aspects of the self. By this command, one part of man's nature must do violence to another. What happens to man when he is turned against himself, when the desired constitution of the soul is made available only through the committing of violence against oneself? In his poem "A Weak Mind in the Mountains," Wallace Stevens explores the consequences of living in the world while maintaining such a posture of self-destruction.

The poem opens with an unusual fixation on

the hand of a "butcher," which is drawn to the forefront of the reader's imagination without any further information. The mystery deepens in the second line: "[h]e squeezed it," we are told, without clarification of the object or the subject. What is the antecedent of "it" — the butcher's hand, or some new, unnamed article? We are left to assume that "[h]e" is the butcher, and "it" is his hand. While the first line presents the hand as a possession, the second sets it apart. If the "he" of the second line is the butcher from the first, then the butcher squeezes the hand as if inspecting some artifact of his environment. It appears that the butcher has attempted to sever an offending member from his own body. If the attempt was successful, the image has gruesome implications. The butcher is holding his own severed hand, measuring it and manipulating it with his remaining appendage, squeezing the lifeblood from it. He is a butcher of himself, as a man must be who follows the command from Matthew 5:30 to commit violence to the offensive aspects of his nature. In Matthew, the severing of the member and the plucking of the eye are all for the sake of escaping the judgment embodied in the casting of the whole body into Hell. But unlike in Matthew, here it is this act of violence that causes the body to follow the path of the blood to the floor. The violence that was deemed necessary for a promised perfection has brought about premature destruction.

The scene abruptly shifts in the poem's second stanza. The stanza's first line reframes the first stanza as an analogous image to some present situation. The grotesque image of the butcher turns out to be the setting of the stage for the newly introduced speaker's

own ongoing struggles. Two winds from opposite hemispheres have converged on the speaker in the dead of night. The meeting of these opposites have gripped the speaker's mind, "gripped it and grappled my thoughts." Two Biblical images collide in this passage. The first is Jacob's wrestling with the unnamed figure in Genesis. By overcoming this figure, Jacob is blessed, for he "has striven with beings divine and human and [has] prevailed" (cf. Genesis 32:25-33). The second image evoked is Jesus' calming of the "windstorm," recounted in the Gospels of Mark, Matthew, and Luke. Luke gives the following account:

While [Jesus and the Apostles] were sailing [Jesus] fell asleep. A windstorm swept down on the lake, and the boat was filling with water, and they were in danger. They went to him and woke him up, shouting, "Master, Master, we are perishing!" And he woke up and rebuked the wind and the raging waves; they ceased, and there was a calm. (Luke 8:23-24)

The struggle in the mind of the speaker recalls Jesus' rebuke of the tempest and Jacob's wrestling. But, as we will see, the speaker is not a man such as Jesus, who could settle such a contest with his rebuke. The speaker is more like Jacob; he must grapple with the winds that have seized his thoughts, though he appears to be outmatched.

There is a striking contrast between what Jesus and Jacob contend with and the speaker's struggles in the poem. Jesus and Jacob dealt with

forces outside of themselves. They jockeyed with externals by virtue of an internal strength. In the poem, the struggle is internal: the converging exotic winds have placed a hold on the speaker's mind, rather than his body. How can we resolve this apparent discrepancy between the poetic and Biblical images?

Perhaps the poem is positing an interpretation of these Scriptural passages. Just as the hand that Jesus commands us to sever from our body is not our literal hand (at least not until Stevens' graphic rendering), but is, rather, a part our mind, the forces that Jacob and Jesus contend with are not external foes. The setting of these characters against great external forces is a figurative expression of our own endeavors with aspects of our nature. This interpretation of these passages recalls the double nature that Jesus teaches in the quoted passage from Matthew.

With this in mind, how are we to understand these winds that have attacked the speaker? Can they, too, be seen, like the windstorm and Jacob's opponent, as aspects of ourselves with which we must contend? Does this interpretation work with the rest of the poem? In the third stanza, the speaker recapitulates the wind's assault on his person. This is followed in the third and fourth line by the return of the first stanza's imagery. Before it was blood from the severed hand that fell to the floor, but now it is the "blood of the mind" that flows to the ground. Has the speaker done some violence to his own mind, analogous to the butcher's work on his hand? If the winds are some aspect of the speaker's own mind, has he made an attempt to sever them from himself? If this is the case, then his efforts are apparently as futile as the butcher's. The

third stanza's final image—"I slept"—lands with a dull thud after the dramatic imagery of the previous stanzas. Although it might remind the reader of the way Jesus peacefully sleeps during the storm, this sleep seems more akin to the sleep of Peter, who lacked the strength ("ουκ ἰσχυσατε") to stay awake as his Lord prayed (Matthew 26:40). The sleep comes from a weakness, an apparent inability to persevere. It recalls the title of the poem. This is the weak mind, unable to live up to the task articulated in the Sermon on the Mount.

The final stanza appears to offer some solace in the face of this failure. The speaker assures us (and perhaps himself) that "there was a man within" him that could have accomplished a series of actions that are all Christ-like. This man within the speaker could have "risen," as Christ does on the third day; could have touched the winds, thereby conquering them; and "could have stood up sharply in the sky," bringing to mind the striking image of Christ on the cross, his silhouette standing out against the sky. But while these assurances are hopeful, they sound hollow. If the speaker actually had this man within him, as he tells us he did, then the speaker's struggles with himself would not have ended in the ambiguous failure of the third stanza. It is precisely because of this failure that he is not the man he describes in the last stanza. These last lines sound like the assurances we give ourselves in the aftermath of an apparent failure. *We could have triumphed*, we say in the face of defeat. The series of conditional statements are the expectations of a foreseen greatness that obscures the speaker's understanding of his own nature. One

suspects, with some sadness, that this is what finally characterizes the speaker as a “weak mind”: he is not only unable to accomplish the task set before him, but also apparently incapable of seeing himself as he is.

This characterization of the struggle to achieve a desired constitution — and perhaps perfection — of mind and soul is predicated on the necessity of turning ourselves into the objects of mental violence. Perhaps Stevens’ poem critiques not the end at which the speaker aims, but rather the means that certain doctrines demand. If this desired character and quality of internal life can be achieved by other methods, then we must re-examine the claim that man’s nature is inherently dual. This leaves a final question: What is this nature that Jesus encourages us to sever from ourselves in Matthew? Can it be worked with and incorporated into an ordered constitution of mind and soul without recourse to psychological self-mutilation?



*Cast Aside / Elizabeth Janthey*





Bir Cezaevinde Tecritteki  
Adamın Mektupları

III

Nazım Hikmet

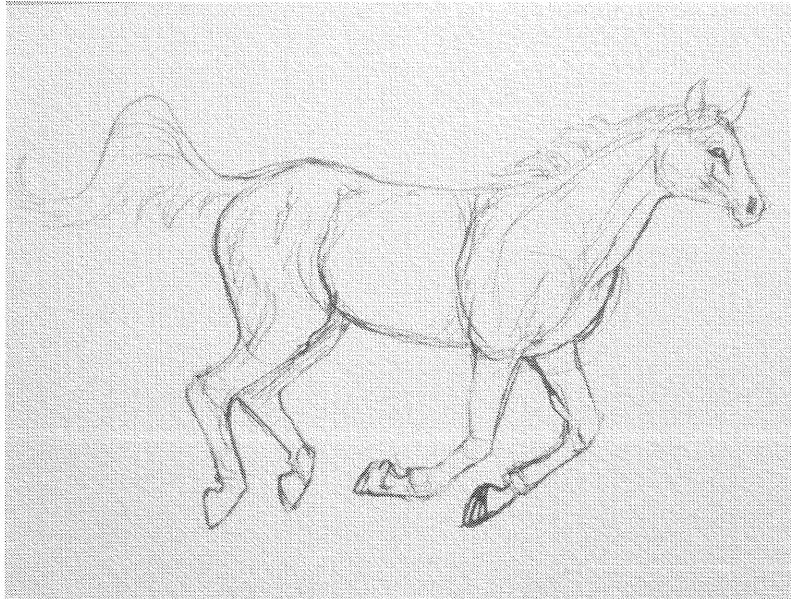
Bugün pazar.  
Bugün beni ilk defa güneşe çıkardılar.  
Ve ben ömrümde ilk defa gökyüzünün bu kadar  
benden uzak  
bu kadar mavi  
bu kadar geniş olduğuna şaşarak  
kımıldanmadan durdum.  
Sonra saygıyla toprağa oturdum,  
dayadım sırtımı duvara.  
Bu anda ne düşmek dalgalara,  
bu anda ne kavga, ne hürriyet, ne karım.  
Toprak, güneş ve ben...  
Bahtiyarım...

Letters of a Man in Solitary  
Confinement

III

*Translated by Gurer Gundondu*

Today is Sunday.  
Today, for the first time, they brought me  
out to the sunlight.  
And for the first time in my life, I stood still  
surprised at how far away from me,  
how blue,  
how wide the sky is.  
Then I sat on the earth with respect,  
leaned my back against the wall.  
In this moment, no aspiration mattered,  
in this moment, nor did the struggle, freedom, my wife.  
Earth, sun and me...  
I am fortunate.



*Horse Study 1 / Sally Ko*

## Postmodern *Don Quijote*

*Eva Brann*

I'm living proof that what curmudgeons claim is impossible is in fact actual: high regard for a book to which I'm full of resistance. I readily admit that *Don Quijote* is a great book (i.e. seminar-worthy), but when I've had to read it for junior seminar, it all but spoiled my summer. Why?

My fellow tutor and good friend in Santa Fe, David Carl, provided the answer: it's a postmodern novel. We were co-leaders of a seminar on *Don Quijote* in Madrid (where Cervantes is buried) and raising a slew of questions, all of which seemed, the more we talked, the less decidable. But how could an early seventeenth century book, generally regarded as the first modern novel, belong to a literary type officially devised in the later twentieth century?

Postmodernism is a disparate category, first conceived as a reaction to architectural modernism, an impersonal, ahistorical, functional style. Later, postmodernism opposed naïve realism in literature by endorsing a type of self-referential writing that attends continually to its own fictionality. And finally postmodernism attacked foundation-seeking philosophy and exploded into many sub-theories. Among these was deconstructionism, one of whose doctrines is the ultimate undecidability, the terminal indeterminism, of all truth-claims. So postmod-

ernism as self-referential fictionality, deconstruction as terminal undecidability — that's what Mr. Carl meant.

Below I'll do only this: list questions about *Don Quijote* to which we in Madrid, twenty or so willing intellects, could find no determinate answer; what's more, we thought that the book was meant to stymie our efforts.

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One: In the last, the one-hundred and twenty-sixth chapter of his Adventures, Don Quijote de la Mancha, the knight, is back to Don Alonso Quijano the Good, a gentleman — his civilian name, as it were. He retracts his knight errant's persona and dies.

Our sophomores may not know that their Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, written two hundred years earlier, also ends with a renunciation of the Tales of Canterbury, *thilke that sounen into sinne*, "such as tend towards sin." (The Retraction follows the Parson's theological prose discourse.) But that's the author disowning his characters, be it for his own secular safety or his spiritual salvation — while his Wife of Bath herself carries on lustily and unrepentantly.

It's different for Cervantes' book. The Don himself, the hero of his book, recants his error, "that there were and still are knights errant in the world ... I was mad and now I am sane" (II 74).

Does this recantation cancel the adventures by exposing them as acts of mere insanity, or

does it confirm them as the revelations of an illuminated imagination? Does it seriously consign the foregoing tales to fanciful drollery and picaresque extravagance, or does it merely display the Don's last days as disillusionment, intended to be discounted, brought on by a lowering of zest in the face of death? Which?

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Two: Who is the author of this book? The book itself gives the last word to one Sidi (Señor) Hamid Benengeli, who wrote it in Arabic (I 9) and who says: "And Don Quijote was born only for me, as I for him; he knew how to act and I how to write; only we two are a unity, in spite of that fake Tordesillan scribbler ..." (II 74; that scribbler produced a spurious Second Part — anticipating its author — under the pseudonym of Avellaneda. A character out of this book turns up in the genuine Second Part, II 72). Sidi Hamid's Arabic text was translated by another Moor, who also acted as an editor, marking parts of the manuscript as apocryphal (II 5); who knows what else he did to the text? There is, furthermore, an "I" who writes Prologues, calls himself Don Quijote's "stepfather" (Prologue to I) and injects himself into the first line of the first chapter as the tale's teller. Later this "I" (Prologue to II) gives himself Cervantian autobiographical distinctions, such as the loss of the left hand in battle. But this "I" claims to be writing the history of a real Don Quijote (I 52), so he can't be all that real himself. The story this

First Person reports is mutilated and leaves off just where Quijote and an inimical Basque are about to split each other's heads. Happily, "I" buys some old notebooks off a boy, and these are found to contain Sidi Hamid's whole composition, which now takes over. "I" is delighted, because Arabs, although liars, are hostile to Spaniards, and so Hamid won't have falsely embellished the tale. But there's also a Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra who, right in the middle of the work, signs a letter of dedication to his patron, which precedes the Prologue to the second Part. And finally there's the knight himself, the character escaping from his false, and searching for his true, author. He is himself a keen critic of histories (though clearly not of chivalric romances) whom we see in the non-spurious Second Part avidly complaining about the author of the First telling so many irrelevant novellas rather than concentrating on him (II 3), and whom we hear even on his deathbed assuming responsibility for the Avellaneda's "high flown nonsense" (II 74) — which is as much to say that he's the author of his fake adventures. Well then, in this spirit of confusion confounded, who is most truly the writer? I vote for the translating and editing Moor, since editors are well known to have primacy over authors; he certainly makes enough marginal comments (e.g., II 61, 74).

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Three: Is the ingenuous Gentleman of La Mancha really or disingenuously mad? When his

squire or his friends try to bring him to his senses, he resists most strenuously — perhaps protests too much? But sometimes the cat gets simply let out of the bag: Sancho tells a tall tale, and "Don Quijote came over to his squire and bending low to his ear said: 'Sancho, if you want me to believe what you think you saw in the sky, you've got to believe what I think I saw in Montesinos' Cave. And that's all I have to say.'" Crazy as a fox!

This Cave of Montesinos is the most mystifyingly significant venue of the book (II 22). Whatever else it means, it tells what the knight knows when in a non-conscious state. Don Quijote is let deep down into the cave's abyss and falls asleep to awake into a dreamscape. To make a long story short, he tells Sancho that in this place two companions of Dulcinea (the rough peasant girl the knight has chosen to transform, worship, and serve as his lady) come and ask him in her behalf to lend her six *reales* against her petticoat as security. He only has four, which he gives to one of the peasant friends, who receives it, ungraciously, and whirls away in cartwheels. (There exists an article giving an — unintendedly — hilarious psychoanalytic interpretation: Quijote's report is a protocol of Freudian dreamwork; Dulcinea is sexually needy; Quijote's being short two *reales* of the sum requested indicates his fear of impotence. To be precise — my addendum — he fears being one-third wanting!)

I think the dream shows that he knows that she's a vulgar girl who'll want money and that he has his hesitations about her and her entourage.

He's at least one third more sane than deluded, deep down. — But which more predominantly? And when?

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Four: Is the world really enchanted for Don Quijote? In children's books an enchanted world is full of magical beings, in adult literature it is full of romantic feeling. Now take the early adventure of the windmills, which fixes the pattern: Enchantment for the knight errant is disenchantment! The windmills are giants, real beings in the true original world that have been transformed magically into workaday windmills in the false, secondary world, in order to spoil Quijote's adventures. He faces a whole world magicked into mundanity to spite his ardor for great deeds. His mission is to dis-disenchant the world, that is, to re-enchant it, to reveal its magic-occluded romance.

The chief case in need of such return from magicked ordinariness is Dulcinea; when he finally saw her in Toboso, Quijote beheld a coarse, ugly peasant (II 10). The condition of the retransformation is absurdly vicarious: Sancho has to agree to a self-flagellation of three-thousand and three-hundred strokes (II 35). What sort of inversion is Don Quijote forcing on the world? Surely a dreary one, because now, when much of the world is revealed as a false front, from which romantic reality has been leached, our workaday ordinariness stands degraded. No wonder his squire dubs

him "The Knight of the Sad Face," a title Quijote accepts because the learned author "responsible for writing the history of my exploits, will have decided it would be good for me to take another name." He himself has no idea why he wears sadness on his face and shield, but it's surely because his errantry has made all that actually confronts him suspect — other than it seems to be, invalid in itself. What demons are these, that strive to vitiate high romance by transforming it into low reality? Are they private to Quijote, a *folie à deux* with Sancho, or perhaps truths for us who are too sane to see it? Who here is mad here and how?

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Five: Who's the hero of this book? Is it actually the man in the title? In the First Part the knight predominates as he helpfully wreaks havoc on his beneficiaries, his so-far compliant squire, himself, and the world in general: Punished boys are rescued only to be beaten the worse by their masters; liberated criminals scatter over the countryside; property is damaged. It is amazing how much bodily mayhem is nonchalantly absorbed by all the folks; no one's pain is likely to elicit even an "ouch" from the reader. — We laugh. In the Second Part, the knight gathers pathos and also acquires a socially useful role — so to speak. Don Antonio, Quijote's host in Barcelona, chides one of the knight's friends who is trying to bring him back to sanity: "May God forgive you for the damage you've done ... in trying to cure the wittiest lu-

natic ever seen! ... [W]hatever utility there might be in curing him, it would not match the pleasure he gives with his madness." So in the big city the Knight of the Sad Face serves the world as a kind of geek (II 65).

Meanwhile Squire Sancho proves to have the makings of a statesman. He's a practical man, full of those saws that encapsulate folk wisdom (like his successor in shrewd simplicity, Platon Karataev in *War and Peace*). But, it turns out, he also possesses a higher-order prudence. After waiting twenty years, he finally gets his wish—his own island to govern (courtesy of that Duke and Duchess whose castle is a major waystation for knight and squire, and in whom generous hospitality and cruel cleverness appear in undecidable proportion). As governor he shows Solomonic sagacity—practicality tinged with wit—in his judgements (II 45 ff.); he cuts through ensnaring logical conundrums with mercy, and his laws are wise and enduring. Being beset by the minders the ducal pair has imposed on him, he displays a last and rare wisdom—he leaves office.

Meanwhile Don Quijote endures mockeries that underscore his pathos for us, but begin subtly to undermine his own confident knight errantry. If the First Part had been subtitled "The Knight and His Squire," might the Second not have been called "The Squire and his Knight"? Well, yes and no. Sancho Panza has his own Cave Experience, but it is Don Quijote who brings deliverance from the pit, and the two go together, closer than ever, to their final adventures. But a

reader—myself—might find the "Paunch" more substantial than his fey, skinny master.

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Six: Is *Don Quijote* a Christian book or a travesty of faith and a take-off on Scripture? There's no denying the many religious references and no making out—I think—how they're meant. For example, Don Quijote proposes that "we can't all be friars ... but knighthood too is a religion ..." (II 8). No doubt there were religious knightly orders, but Quijote's is an order of one whose patent comes from his own imagination—and, of course, his deathbed retraction can be said to undermine his life's errantry.

There are allusions to the life of Jesus. The knight is paraded in Saragosa by his host Don Antonio, not wearing armor but street clothes, not riding Rocinante but a mule, with a sign affixed to his back "This is Don Quijote de la Mancha: (II 62), Who can help but think of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem on an ass, and the mocking sign nailed over his head at the Crucifixion: "This is Jesus the King of the Jews" (Matthew 27:2 ff., 27:37)? Is this pious allusion or blasphemous parody? But the main parallel comes from the false Don Quijote of Avellaneda, who precedes the knight's Second Coming and dogs him from first to last in the Second Part, more and more toward the end (e.g. *Don Quijote* II Prologue, 62, 72, 74). Recall the New Testament: before the Christ's return "false Christs and false prophets shall rise and shall shew



signs and wonders to seduce, if it were possible, even the elect" (Mark 13:22). Is the Don a comic Christ, and is that a permissible or an impermissible distinction to accord him? — Unanswerable.

\*

Seven: A small last open question. Is the book organic, in the sense that all its parts function for the sake of the whole? Do, for example, the set romances retailed in the Sierra Morena — delightful to somebody, perhaps, but boring to many of us — have a furthering purpose? Don Quijote himself complains of them as an irrelevant distraction from the telling of his own affairs (II 3). Is the multitude of adventures a purposeful series or just a vagrant redundancy — except for those who can't get enough of high jinks? And finally, the most puzzling fact: the "I"'s insistence, stated at the very beginning, that "the whole thing is an attack on romantic tales of chivalry" (First Part, Prologue) and Sidi Hamid's reiteration, at the very end, "that all I ever wanted was to make men loathe the concocted, wild-eyed stories told as tales of chivalry" (II 79) — which intention, if one believed it, would obviate all attempts at finding more than topical meaning. So, are there depths beyond the novel's novelty? Can there ever be depth without a firm foundation? Is there delectation in bottomlessness?

\*

I think I've justified the appellation "post-modernist/deconstructionist" for the work: terminal indeterminism, self-involved fictionality, hovering undecidability. But it's a great book, doubtless.

[I've used the English translation by Burton Raffel (Miguel de Cervantes, *Don Quijote*, New York: W.W. Norton, 1999), except in one instance: In II 62, where Raffel says "beast," other translations say "mule."]

## Birkat Hashachar (Morning Blessings)

*Sarah Marx*

when dawn sets in, my skin begins to crawl  
as though the dew were settling in the folds  
of each willowy hair. my window holds  
a golden cache of sunlight, and it all –

– as if unwound, untethered – tumbles through  
and burnishes my dirty naked feet  
(speckled with putrid liquor, rank and sweet)  
as gilt as little apples that once grew

upon the withered shrub behind my fence,  
now guarded, not by angels, but by years.  
these dawns, with rootless birdcalls in my ears,  
I feel a fear so luscious and immense

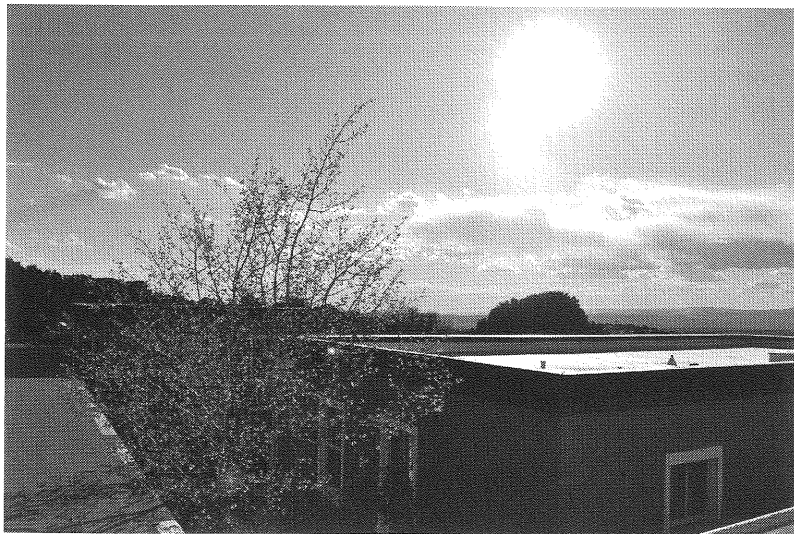
it starts to smell like awe – a fear to die  
and miss, or live and lose, the bristling air,  
the frantic hum of rainfall, my ripe share  
in this full-throated world. now, as I lie

in bed, the bulging earth is birthed anew,  
and I, daughter of texts and bread and time,  
of daily love, despairing and sublime,  
open my fists and lips and call to You.

## Crepe-Myrtle (“End-of-Summer-Flowers”)

*Sarah Marx*

August was lucky to give birth to you,  
dry birdlike blossoms, coaxed like fledgling flame  
from summer’s heat. There’s some exacter name  
for you than end-of-summer-flowers, but true,  
you surface only in the final days  
of sunlit things, and tell the teary child  
that school will come, and breathe – cloying and wild –  
your scent into the wistful evening haze.  
Within your breeze-bleached layers is a gem  
of captured instants, buried in the folds  
of lace and circumstance and humid air;  
women may catch you falling, and for them,  
    your crumpling leaves, your whites and pinks and golds,  
    hold old things to remember, if they dare.



*Untitled / Ekemezie Uche*



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