

The Nesciad

Initially it was rumored that nobody ever saw the fat slob leave his lonely lodgings, but that was long before anyone knew what time it was. Neither had our knowhow commenced to slice, divvy, and dole into discrete units the amorphous mass of this we-still-don't-know-what, and to carve up the plump flesh of life into bite-sized pieces, nor had the jostling jig of questions and inquiries begun to giddyup. So the event ultimately had to be posited by the finest calculators and chroniclers of the retrograde motions of causal logic, a system which since its inception had taken some principle of succession as its fundamental axiom, and likewise had held fast to positing agents before actions, obstructions before abstractions, eggs before chickens (bah-gagkhk!), and so forth. Therefore, at the end of a long succession of events, and undoubtedly accompanied by a great effort of forget?ing, a principal moment finally fell into focus, or at least provisional agreement had been made to this effect by those in whom the arbitrary power of say-so had been vested—ah-men. So for the first time someone could have said with nearly unsullied Veracity, rather than her wanton siblings, “I saw him!”, and a goddamned story could start.

It was at that moment (or the moment just before) that our penurious protagonist appeared on the scene, destined to be the forefather of a brief line of mediocrity and disappointment, but here, however fleetingly, lionized to main character status and made the subject of many sentences, partially through want of his author's

imagination, and partially through the sheer hazard of circumstance that placed him before the mind's eye of the curiously indulgent reader (you won't be mentioned again, so take bows for your patience and be done with it already). And so¹ this sorry lump of a somebody once and for all took to his feet, and set out on some expedition, seeking to explore the space of a pronoun. Clad in abstractions, he was shielded from the sharp barbs of reality by the gossamer fabric of poetic form, which he was taught to believe was woven of magic powers, but which would now be put to the test. And so he set out to thicken time, and whip into a gloppy batter what had hitherto been as thin as the face of the waters.

Thus "Old Swamp Pants" (as those who revered him through mockery would subsequently refer to him, as well as those who didn't) emerged from whatever confines had housed his person into something that took him outside of himself. Cast amidst a vast mass of new others, inside-out and full of guile, he felt for once the full tickle of life—rubbing his belly against the outer world, he romanticized his Helens, set life in italics through acts of consumption, gave meat to his purgings, and studied the meaning of the phrase "right there." Uttering incantations of sacred profanity, under wan winter moons he kicked kazatsky, and gobbled links of kishka—he buttered bialies and potchkied with tsastkalas. In the face of any Johnny Boombahts he met he bravely brandished his alternate -isms: idealism, materialism,

¹ The legitimacy of this structure of inference is the subject of debate, speculation, accusation, and calumny among numerous leading authorities, as well as among those that place or show (for further discussion cf. the work of Bumperstickers and Doughnutbags). If from a different perspective this all might seem so much minutiae and tedious, prefatory throat-clearing, it is worth noting the considerable number of precocious minds that succumb to the narcotic lures of the speculative space of such crooked crannies.

skepticism, epicureanism, asceticism, aestheticism, Gnosticism, agnosticism, Theism, Deism, Whoism, Howism, Rosicrucianism, Rastafarianism, Romanticism, Revolutionism, Reactionism. In his wake he thereby left a host of vanquished foes, or at least many in need of another drink.

Yet within the span of some unspecified chronometric, having either strayed from his determinant way, or having lacked all intention upon setting out, the poor slob found himself lost amidst some thicket of thought. Caught between why and how, thus and therefore, word and world, sound and sense, fate and freedom, and all their associated aporias, he was snagged up to his swampy armpits in the gangly entanglements of cognition, rumination, lucubration, and other such latinate labors. On the verge of being pinned to a precarious precipice above an abyss (or “under a bus”—[textual variants exist]) he somehow stumbled his clumsy way into what seemed like a curious clearing. Such a sudden change of scenery was not unwanted. The only task that now remained was to interpret the state of affairs.

“C’mon comedian!!” came from the mezzanine.

When lo and behold, there among the underbrush, lower than his netherparts, his gaze fastened upon an unguarded, gently nestled egg. Its precise positioning could have been the work of nothing other than a fully intentional, conscious being, and had he tilted his head to the side, this gaping gawker would have found the spotted spoils softly illuminated by a lonely slant of light, perfect enough to make realism

blush. Whatever meat might have been incubating in this oblong, oddly mottled, slightly salt-and-pepper speckled ovum—whatever future creature harbored its destiny in the primordial goo of its contents—whatever quiet mass quivered its jellied being within the fragile belly of that pre-shattered paradise—whatever mischief nestled itself in the silence and shadow of this yet unhatched enclosure—whatever answer to a riddle not yet posed to a man who had not yet arrived was to be discovered within, none of this could have been known at this time, neither intuited, scented, suspected, nor divined. Untrained in oology as he was, of its origin he knew nothing—rather, he was minding other matters. So it must have been then that he hatched a plot to fetch this egg, and decided either to serve it to himself sunnyside-up as a midday meal, or to flip it for a profit, depending on market value at the time.

Prodded by vague intimations of injunctions and prohibitions, he pondered for an instant the rectitude of this pending petty pilfery—but his memory having quickly run aground after recitation of some three or so commandments, he reasoned that no serious injunction would be tucked so far from the reach of recall—and besides, in an age that saw trickery, treachery, and trumpery, as a governing trinity of principles for the inhabitants of this great ourfatherland, it was unlikely that an act of theft would face reproof for anything worse than want of alliterative agreement. Thereupon his qualms were laid to rest, decked in their lazy nightcaps and ever eager to drowse, and the flexible libertine turned his sly self to pragmatic matters.

So he pricked his ears and cocked an eye, to find if he had been espied, and to ascertain whether any somebodies or anybodies happened to encroach upon his otherwise impermeable lonesomeness at this particular juncture, and thereby necessitate the setting in motion a process of negotiation, execution, transaction, betrayal, and retribution, which commonly comprise the course of collaborative criminality, if not of other careers. Dallying was no option, as he had already almost blown his chance—from afar he began to hear a grumpy grumbling growing closer: *“toomanybooks—toomanybooks,”* bellowed in approach from below.

He knew to make quick.

Upon determining himself either free to act or compelled to do so, he took the liberty of pleasuring himself, and in defiance of otherwise sound theories of metaphysics, he got down to action: he stuffed the precious plunder centralmost in his ventral pouch, and took to his heels.

Plump he swelled, full of life, and paying homage to his cunning with a full blush of his fleshy face, he wended a devious way homewards.

Soon his situation was certain, and by the time he had worked his way back around he had begun to make serious progress. Just around the bend was a juggler who tossed aloft “this” “these” and “those”, before adding “therefore”, “thus” and “although”—occasionally he would pin one to various points of his body, and whirl

the others more rapidly—occasionally he would forget he was juggling, and enter a rapturous state, but this was inevitably interrupted by his making an error and dropping evrything. As the absence of any audience would suggest, these were just practice sessions, but having spent so many years in such training, he had see the means had become the ends, and learned to listen with relish to the silence that ensued when he paused. —*toomanybooks—toomanybooks*—

Further down a dim constellation of lights gave a soft glow to some swath of bramble—local legend has transmitted that this was the habitation of a disenchanted magician who had studied the black arts on fellowship, but after failing his qualifying exams had turned to card tricks in parks before retreating to more remote districts where he lapsed into a melancholic temperament that manifested itself in the alternate guises of fruitless brooding and tedious, dull, grey indifference.

But the pressure of time was accumulating—*toomanybooks—toomanybooks*—
The stars above would have been brilliant had they not been blocked by clouds, but the absence of watchful eyes not always being disadvantageous, our principal poacher construed this as propitious, and slunk his sly self along. “I-am,that-I-am,that-I-am,that-I-am,that-I-am, that,” blithered some birdsong from a unseen branch above—a low ambient resonance rose to audibility from octaves beneath: “heeeere I am, heeeere I am,” croaked a curious belching from the murky surface of some stagnant body below.

What happened next has not yet been agreed upon by philology, theology, psychology, ornithology, toxicology, oenology nor by any of the numerous other sincere efforts to make sense out of any-damn-part of whatever-the-hell-all-this-is. All that is known is

Some who adhere to negative epistemologies find assertions of ignorance to be the only candidates for the status of truth—others insist these theories fail to account for clear, empirical facts, and posit that the egg was cleft in twain either as an expression of some form of an intention, or through a manifestation of curious contingency, the precise nature of which was still subject to controversy, though recent discoveries had suggested the hope of impending resolution. Still others, who revered shattered things, claimed that even though no incontrovertible evidence of such a fracturing event was extant, the inference was warranted by its continuity with our knowledge of the rest of this mess, which they believed to be rarely better than tragically partial, and to never quite touch the goddamn-thing-in-itself, which, to be honest, seemed to fare best when left independent of the greedy grubbing of our dull monkey brains (*toomanybooks—toomanybooks*)—they doctrinally referred to the occurrence as “the bing-boing,” and held annual festivals and professional conferences in its honor.

Phykundities: We must contemplate the essence of change. If a seed produces a tree, is it correct to say there is an essence of the latter in the former, or should we stick our hysteron up our proteron?

Mediokrates: this is the question of entering the circle of contemplation. Or getting others to do it for you. The more we ponder something the less certain it becomes.

What to make of weights and measures?

Phykundities: Clearly there must be some purpose in this.

Alliosophistries: There is no proper beginning—rather, it is a matter of locating an itch and scratching yourself. Or finding someone to rub up against you.

Mediokrates: Tell us, tell us.

Alliosophistries: What you know, you know.

Pigstigglikatos: On the one hand it is as you say, but on the other hand it is different.

These and countless other dialogues went on until there was no one left to listen.

One day, the murky bottom stood still—one day the murky top up and stopped. It would have been a sad day,

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It's already tedious—it will never sell—what were you thinking?

Cut the excess words.

Then there's nothing.