

# TSIM TSUM

by

SABRINA ORAH MARK

(Under the Direction of Edward Pavlic)

## ABSTRACT

The introduction, “How To Make a Poem out of Tsim Tsim,” is a critical exploration of *Tsim Tsum*, a Kabbalistic claim in Jewish mysticism that a being cannot become, or come into existence, unless the creator of that being departs from that being. As its title suggests, the essay attempts to illustrate how a *Tsim Tsum* can be enacted poetically. Using historical fragments, personal anecdote, and literary influences, the essay illustrates how *galut* or exile can be injected into a poem formally and stylistically.

*Tsim Tsum* is a collection of prose poems. At the center of these poems are Beatrice and Walter B., two figures hatched in *galut* or exile. In many ways Walter B. and Beatrice are immigrants in their native land. Along the way they encounter The Healer, The Collector, Walter B.’s Extraordinary Cousin, The Oldest Animal, and an assemblage of humans who mystify the nature of humanity. All these figures are staged to explore the immigrant experience, survival, testimony, and belonging.

INDEX WORDS: Judaism, tsim tsum, tikkun, prose poem, Jewish mysticism, Holocaust, exile, galut, The Oldest Animal, Walter B., Beatrice, immigrant experience, belonging, Poland

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by

SABRINA ORAH MARK

B.A., Barnard College, Columbia University 1997

M.F.A., The University of Iowa, 2001

A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2008

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SABRINA ORAH MARK

Major Professor: Edward Pavlic

Committee: Andrew Cole  
Jed Rasula

Electronic Version Approved:

Maureen Grasso  
Dean of the Graduate School  
The University of Georgia  
May 2008

DEDICATION

*for the oldest animal & Sandman*

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Grateful acknowledgement to the editors of the following publications in which these poems first appeared, occasionally as reprints or in slightly altered form:

<i>The Best American Poetry 2007:</i>	“The 10 Stages of Beatrice”
<i>Black Clock:</i>	“The Delivery”
	“The Departure”
	“The Disasters”
	“Long Ago and Far Away”
	“The Organization”
<i>Boston Review:</i>	“The Drawing”
<i>Columbia Poetry Review:</i>	“Aster”
	“Cryptozoology”
<i>Conduit:</i>	“The 10 Stages of Beatrice”
	“The Description”
	“Poland”
<i>Cranky:</i>	“The Oldest Animal Writes a Letter Home”
	“On the Way to Mist Must”
<i>Fishouse:</i>	“The Box”
	“The Name”
	“The Reality Testing Booth”
	“The Saddest Gown in the World”
	“Walter B.’s Extraordinary Cousin Arrives for Visit”
<i>Forklift, Ohio:</i>	“The Creation”
	“The Stethoscope”
<i>Harvard Review:</i>	“The Ruse”
	“The Word”
<i>The Indiana Review:</i>	“The Reality Testing Booth”
<i>Jubilat:</i>	“The Definition of a Thief”
	“The Healer”
<i>Octopus Magazine:</i>	“The Marks of Walter B.’s Power”
	“Parashas Acharei Mos”
	“The Traitor”
<i>Soft Targets:</i>	“The History of Stray”
	“The Preservation”
<i>Typo:</i>	“Beatrice Takes a Lover”
	“Walter B. Needs Some Time”
	“The Mistake”

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INTRODUCTION: HOW TO MAKE A POEM OUT OF TSIM TSUM

In “The Messianic Idea in Kabbalism,” Gershom Scholem names the most highly respected system formulated in Safed as the Kabbalah of Rabbi Isaac Luria Ashkenazi (1534-72), later called the Ari (the “Lion”).<sup>1</sup> *Galut*, or exile, as the Ari saw it, was not only the Jewish State (psychically and geographically), but a condition of the universe, and of the creator. According to the Ari, the universe was created by a God who because he did not reveal Himself enabled the world to be revealed. This phase is called *Tsim Tsum*, a Kabbalistic claim that a being cannot *become*, or come into existence, unless the creator of that being departs from that being. And in this *Tsim Tsum* emanation and limitation (or retreat and propagation) share the same breath. “But it was *sudden*,” writes the poet Nick Flynn, “how overnight we could be orphaned / & the world become a bell we’d crawl inside / & the ringing all we’d eat.”<sup>2</sup> The Kabbalists believed that right before God made His exit He filled garbs and vessels with His light, not to bring with Him but to leave here. It is a startling moment of divine despair and desperation. As if the world is a painting illegibly signed. And the signature is a sad and beautiful one. It echoes a posthumous gasp to be remembered. These containers (these garbs and vessels) at the end, like the overstuffed trunks of clothes and letters left behind by estranged mothers and fathers, cannot hold the light. The garbs and vessels burst and shatter. Scholem explains that the light is scattered everywhere, and we spend the rest of our lives collecting the offspring of this light. We spend the rest of our lives trying to make what once was broken whole again. This, according to the Kabbalists, begins the history of trauma.

A few years ago I was browsing through a junk shop in Athens, Georgia and found a glass jar filled with an incomplete set of old alphabet blocks. Through the glass I could see some of the letters were worn away. Each block held two letters (each in uppercase and lowercase), and an image that began with each letter: “D/d” had a pink doll, “A/a” had a blue

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<sup>1</sup> Gershom Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1971) 44.

<sup>2</sup> Nick Flynn, “Sudden” in *Some Ether* (Saint Paul: Graywolf Press, 2000) 18.

airplane, “B/b” had a brown bear, “W/w” had a red whistle, “S/s” had a yellow star, and so on, and so forth. I had just learned about *Tsim Tsum*, and the find brought me a sense of calm. As a Jewish New Yorker living in a small town in Georgia I was experiencing my own wobbly *galut*, and I felt an affinity with the claim and a rush of excitement when I found for it in that junk shop an objective correlative. A flawed correlative, I admit, as each block was only metaphor, and the jar had not yet burst, but it felt (for the time being) like an object that came very close to the beauty of the impulse I was after: that impulse to contain what must be left behind. I bought the jar, but never opened it because it felt like an attempt at salvage that would be blasphemous to disrupt. I wound around the neck of the jar a small tag. On the tag I wrote “TSIM TSUM.” I gave the jar to my dearest friend.

Because I am a poet, my fascination with *Tsim Tsum* led me to wonder if I could enact this wondrous phase in Jewish mysticism poetically. I had just finished my first book *The Babies*. It is a war book, or more specifically it is a collection of *imagined* testimonies spoken by the *imagined* ones who never lived because of war. One section of the book, entitled *The Walter B. Interviews* introduce Walter B. and Beatrice, two figures who are hatched at the center of ruin. When the book was done I began to miss Walter B. and Beatrice. I wanted them to return to me, but because they already were goners (so to speak) I needed to make for them a field, a field contingent on *being gone*, on *galut*, and meet them there. This order is in keeping with the Kabbalist’s conception of redemption: first comes catastrophe, then, annihilation, and then comes *tikkun* or restoration. First there is the “forgetting of the Torah and the upsetting of all moral order to the point of dissolving the laws of nature,” and then there is repair.<sup>3</sup> The world of *tikkun*, according to Scholem, is “the re-establishment of the harmonious condition of the world.”<sup>4</sup> He writes:

The escapist and extravagant character of such utopianism,  
which undertakes to determine the content of redemption without

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<sup>3</sup> Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism*, 12.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

having experienced it yet in fact, does of course subject it to the wild indulgence of fantasy. But it always retains that fascinating vitality to which no historical reality can do justice and which in times of darkness and persecution counterpoises the fulfilled image of wholeness to the piecemeal, wretched reality which was available to the Jew.<sup>5</sup>

What Gershom Scholem imagines here as utopian, fantastical, extravagant, and escapist, I have heard the Israeli novelist Amos Oz refer to as “a third state,” as a state of reconciliation, where what once was dissonant becomes harmonious, where you are offered *either* herring *or* marmalade and you decide you will have a little of both. *Tikkun*, for the Kabbalists, is made in preparation for the coming of the Messiah. For my artistic purposes, my attempt at *tikkun* is made in preparation for the return of Walter B. and Beatrice. “In the footsteps of the Messiah,” according to the Mishnah (the oral Torah), “...the house of assembly will become a brothel...the people of the frontiers will wander from city to city and none will pity them...the wisdom of the scribes will become odious...truth will nowhere be found...”<sup>6</sup> In order for me to stage Beatrice and Walter B. under the laws of *Tsim Tsum*, as a way to effect for them a *tikkun*, I needed to drape them in exile, lodge them in a ruined world, and imagine them as immigrants in their native land and as wanderers. Their creator must be hidden from them, and consequently the "actual" meaning of things must be hidden from them too. Ontologically, they are to be out of the question.

As I set out to map the topography of *Tsim Tsum* onto a poem, I knew I had to further investigate the genesis of *galut*. I began to think about the shards of light, which brought to mind the first words spoken in the Torah: “let there be light.” And there is light, and as quickly as God makes this command it is God who divides *between* the light and *between* the darkness, so that the original words mark an illumination that depends on a division that depends also on darkness. God’s first words make a line that cuts him in two. It is the

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 13-14.

<sup>6</sup> End of the Mishnah tractate Sota.

original act of metaphor. It is an utterance that births a hide, a hide that becomes the garb of being that keeps the decipherability of its being hidden from it. What *Tsim Tsum* does ontologically, metaphor does linguistically. Both depend on *galut*. Metaphor makes language lack a certain presence where language happens to be. *Tsim Tsum* belongs us to bewilder.

Would it be enough I wondered then to overflow a poem with metaphor as a way to mimic *Tsim Tsum* poetically? Writing in metaphor rakes an elsewhere field for the whole, magical encyclopedia of viscera, but it also annihilates the original body. Metaphor cracks open the word, as if the word were a shell, and carries its internal belongings far away from it and houses it in another. What are the consequences, I wondered, of leaving that first shell behind, spooned out, and empty? I remembered a story by Bruno Schulz called “The Night of a Great Season” where the father (the cloth merchant, the seller of garbs) watches in rage as his customers finger the folds of his fabrics, drape themselves in it, and in this state of shroud he listens to them babble without cease:

And down below, at the bottom of that Sinai which rose from my father’s anger, stood the gesticulating crowd, cursing, worshipping Baal and the bargaining. They draped their hands into the soft folds of fabric, they draped themselves in colored cloth, they wrapped improvised cloaks around themselves, and talked incoherently and without cease.<sup>7</sup>

I felt warned. Too much metaphor, too much shrouded viscera, would only *begin* an enactment of *Tsim Tsum*, and without heeding the following caution it would be a failed attempt. Schulz stages here the botched beginning of a *Tsim Tsum*, as the seller of garbs is apart from the crowd, but in a state of wrath. Schulz also stages a fumbling for a *tikkun* as the crowd gathers and drapes themselves in pieces of cloth, but he hooks to this scene the predicament of babble. The crowd “curses” and “bargains” and worships the wrong god. Like hands slipping into puppets, the customers use their own bodies to return movement to the garbs. And shouldn’t this be enough? Why then does babble ensue? Why is this crowd

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<sup>7</sup> Bruno Schulz, “The Night of the Great Season,” in *The Street of Crocodiles* (New York: Penguin Books, 1977) 133-134.

irredeemable? To adequately mimic a *Tsim Tsum* the poem cannot only use metaphor to house what departed from the shell, but it must also account for the wounded shell. I believe the babble that ensues is the failure of the crowd to account for absence. They are consumers. They are invested in acquisition and forget to mourn (even unconsciously). They are incoherent, and their failure to make any sense meant I could not simply mimic their choreography and map it onto a poem. It would not be enough. I had to keep searching.

Theodor Adorno also knows Schulz's crowd. He writes, "even the most extreme consciousness of doom threatens to degenerate into idle chatter... To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric."<sup>8</sup> I understand this claim as one that carries the poet up to the front and does not condemn, but asks that poetry made after Aushwitz be barbarian in that it must stop speaking the same language of its language (barbaros being an onomatopoetic imitation of babbling)<sup>9</sup>, and must now be occupied and occupy strangeness.<sup>10</sup> This occupation can turn the poem into a receptacle figure that echoes a *Tsim Tsum* in that it asks the poem to shed like a glare. Still my urge was not to make poems that felt like terrified confetti. If a *Tsim Tsum* was going to be felt in a poem in all its glory, the enactment of a shredded world enabled through metaphor would need to tell a coherent story. The glare would need to offer illumination. "This is so nice," writes Gertrude Stein, "and sweet and yet there comes the change, there comes the time to press more air. This does not mean the same as

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<sup>8</sup> Theodor Adorno, "Cultural Criticism and Society" in *Prisms*, trans. Samuel Weber and Shierry Weber (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1981) 34.

<sup>9</sup> This babbling refers back to The Tower of Babel and reminds us of the density of metaphor (as a fissure, as the impossibility of ever calling anything again by its name) at the site of disaster: "Come let us build us a city, and a tower, with its top in heaven, and let us make us a name; lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth. And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the children of man builded. And the Lord said: Behold, (they are) one people, and they have all one language and this (is what) they begin to do, and now there will not be with-holden from them anything which they purpose to do. Come, let us go down, and confound there their language that they may not understand one another's speech. So the Lord scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth; and they left off to build the city" (Genesis 11: 4-9). This biblical moment is eerily reminiscent of a *Tsim Tsum*, but also of Hitler's rise to power and his call for an extermination of scatter (or difference) in order to empty the tower for a "superior" absolute. It also accounts for the babble of Schulz's crowd.

<sup>10</sup>The translation of "barbarism" as "strangeness" and the idea that *barbaros* is an onomatopoetic imitation of "babble" is taken from Lyn Hejinian's essay "Barbarism." Lyn Hejinian, "Barbarism" in *The Language of Inquiry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000) 326.

disappearance.”<sup>11</sup> In a torn up world, Stein’s *Tender Buttons* (1914) (her biography of objects, rooms, and food) tear the sentence up and make out of word-assemblages a kind of nonsense that stages the word as a thing infused with fingers that points the word away from itself. Stein cracks open the shell that has kept the word impoverished of its *other* discourse. She makes language stop speaking the same language as its language, not as an act of annihilation but as an act of restoration. Which is to say, Stein does not abandon the cracked-up word. Wrench does not dissolve it. Nor does it completely vanish when its keeper (or shell, or name) vanishes. Instead, Stein sweeps the offspring of its shatter up (its deadness, its paralysis) and through a syntactical bartering, she returns the word to the world now saturated in its own exile – because everything is in exile (as it is in *Tsim Tsum*), and for now it is exile where everything belongs. Paul Celan knew this too. “Once when death was mobbed,” he writes, “you took shelter in me.”<sup>12</sup> Celan’s poetry maintains that a poem’s “speaking” remain contingent on an unspeakability. Consider how deeply Celan accounts for the wounded shell. It becomes the shofar through which he speaks his poems because here it is the “I” who carves its body out, like the shell of a word, as a growing place for the no ones, or the non-vixits<sup>13</sup> who have gone unfinished. The body becomes, like the word, foreign to itself as it becomes a nurture-hole for the figures made strange because they are mobbed out of death. And like the state of *galut* (understood by the Ari as a condition of concealment that enables an effect to be revealed) the shell through which Celan speaks through combined with the silence enacted by the staggering white space on the page calls up the remains of something still remaining to be said, but also something that can no longer (ever) be heard. In Celan, every limb alludes to a limbless body. Every finger points to a fingerless hand. Again, this is not an annihilation, but

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<sup>11</sup> Gertrude Stein, “Tender Buttons” in *Three Lives & Tender Buttons* (New York: Penguin Books, 2003) 289.

<sup>12</sup> Paul Celan, *Last Poems*, trans. Katherine Washburn and Margaret Guillemain (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1986) 23.

<sup>13</sup> I am borrowing this term *non vixit* from Freud’s *non vixit dreams* (in *The Interpretation of Dreams*). Of a deceased friend Freud means to say *non vivit*, but slips and says *non vixit*. This slippage blurs the act of memorialization and the act of annihilation.

a gathering up of a wounded language that is not “lost,” as he reminds us in his *Bremen Speech*, but a language saturated in the shards of exile, that must “go through its own lack of answers, through terrifying silence, through the thousand darknesses of murderous speech...went through and could resurface ‘enriched’ be it all.”<sup>14</sup>

For years I have been in awe of Celan and Stein’s ability to so deeply enact content through form. Their poems taught me that in order to build a poem out of *Tsim Tsum* meant I had to account for every bone that held it up, for all its breath. For Walter B. and Beatrice I wanted to make a language that spoke to and out of every crevice of this phase in Jewish mysticism I wanted so deeply for them to be part of. To house them in only a few of its shards was not enough. Of course, to resound voices already uttered, tweak them, and sign them as my own was not what I was after. Already I knew metaphor would be the first hand I held in my quest to enact a *Tsim Tsum* poetically. But how would these metaphors be composed, and how could their composition account for their wounded shells?

My maternal family escaped Vienna during the Holocaust, and my great-aunt was allowed to bring with her one last object. She chose a porcelain doll. Her mother wrapped it in newspaper for transport. Years later, my great-aunt unwrapped the newspaper to show me the doll. I must’ve been seven or eight. The day she unwrapped the doll was the same day it had been wrapped, according to the date on the paper. I remember it was November. The doll was broken. The eye was coming out of its socket, and I think one leg was loose. We decided to take a trip into Manhattan to bring the doll to the doll hospital to get her repaired. When we got to the hospital, though, the doll doctor was hollering at someone on the telephone, and his hollering frightened me, shook me into tears, and we left. The doll was never fixed. Over the years the doll fragmented and fell further and further apart. I believe the genesis of my quest begins with this doll. All of *Tsim Tsum*’s essential themes reside in her: exile, transience, ruin, and return. She isn’t a poem, but she may as well be. I consider this doll to be the body that

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<sup>14</sup>Paul Celan, *Collected Prose*, trans. Rosmarie Waldrop (New York: The Sheep Meadow Press 1986) 34.



birthed Walter B. and Beatrice. I wished to store the doll's depths, like the poem that stores the unconscious, in their bodies.

If metaphor can initially be understood as sacrifice (the departure of one for the entrance of another), a sacrifice that ends in shatter, fragment, displacement – then the gather and harvest of this shatter, the stringing the shards together, is what makes allegory. In allegory realms of experience are parallel, unknowable, unnameable, invisible, -- and yet presumable. Its pose is made out of the empty, broken vessels of an escaped god (as if everything is whole again), yet its arrangement becomes the keeper of doctrines knowledge cannot absorb. But allegory still seeks to hold if not the doctrine the transmissibility of doctrine: that space, perhaps, in between, or inside the exact moment the creator departs to enable creation – that place between erase and inscribe. In the Zohar, the hidden God is called En-Sof, or Without End, and must be reconciled with the God that sent us down the commandments. Here even doctrine is marked by slippages between end and endlessness. It opens and closes the book at once. It is like a single verse that unravels from a spool, but as it moves forward it always refers back. This movement makes knots, knots allegory depend on to achieve a quality of wonder.

To make a poem out of *Tsim Tsum* asks the poet to assume the role of the collector. Walter Benjamin imagines the collector as one who rakes for the object (whether it be a doll, or an incomplete set of old alphabet blocks, or a word) a “newly acquired place,” yet maintains an engagement with the dialectic of proximity and distance.<sup>15</sup> The far away eclipses the near, according to Walter Benjamin, “in every single one of [the ‘true collector’s’] possessions, to form a whole magic encyclopedia, a world order, whose outline is the *fate* of his object.”<sup>16</sup> “No sooner,” writes Benjamin, “does he hold [the objects] in his hand than he

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<sup>15</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 2002) 205.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, 207.

appears inspired by them and seems to look through them into their distance, like an augur.”<sup>17</sup> And also the collector is like an auger, a tool that bores into an earth once “stamped down hard and firm.”<sup>18</sup> Benjamin worries that “to pry an object from its shell” is to “destroy its aura,” that to transport the object means that now nothing much is alive in its air.<sup>19</sup> Here I am given another point to consider as I prepare to enact a *Tsim Tsum*. Once I “pry” the “object from its shell” through metaphor, how do I then inscribe into the poem that strange, nervous space between the lifting up and the placing back down, that space between proximity and distance. Into what kind of dwelling place does aura go when it goes into exile? What happens in that moment right after a heart is raised out of one human body and that moment right before it is transplanted into another? In transport, is aura still and dead? Or does it live like a ghost to be reckoned with now, and later, and later again? How do I inscribe on a poem that moment, that *exact* moment, the creator departs from His creation?

As Walter B. and Beatrice patiently wait for a poem made out of *Tsim Tsum*, let me tell a story about a shoe. In 1996 my brother participated in The March of the Living. Along with over five thousand other Jewish children, he marched through Auschwitz, Majdanek, Birkenau, and Treblinka. The march is a march of remembrance. From above, it looks like a moving grid. It looks like a mobile, human architecture. Perhaps an aerial photograph of this march exists somewhere, in a box, collected, like a “unique phenomenon of distance, however close it may be.”<sup>20</sup> This moving architecture acts as a bizarre humanization of what Daniel Libeskind, in “Traces of the Unborn,” is looking to assemble when he acknowledges “a need to respond to history, the need to open up the future: that is, to delineate the invisible on the

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Walter Benjamin, “Hitler’s Diminished Masculinity” in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume II 1927-1934*, ed. Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1996) 792.

<sup>19</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1968) 223.

<sup>20</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1968) 223.

basis of the visible.”<sup>21</sup> Real live children march through the camps shocking us back into that place where real live children are no longer. The march can also be read through Benjamin’s Angel of History, as one large face “turned toward the past.”<sup>22</sup> They “would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed.”<sup>23</sup> But they must keep moving. The following year a new group of children will return to “relive” the same march. When I consider this mobile, human architecture from above, its eternal return, I understand that its aura must be considered both spatially and temporally. It becomes an aerial shot that repeats itself year after year, but never as an exact copy, for as the march is studied more closely I see that this year the children are different. These are different children yawning, or looking, or marching silently. These are different children.

A few years ago, my brother told me a story about a quiet, shy boy who he marched beside. He remembers this boy, upon their arrival at Auschwitz, taking a child’s shoe from a mountain of shoes, and shoving it into his pocket. My brother remembers the boy not knowing why he had done this, as if the task of collector was thrust upon him suddenly, strangely. The story continues that the boy carried this shoe with him for the duration of the march, occasionally turning to my brother, nervously, because not only did he not know what compelled him to lift the shoe from its last resting place, but he also did not know what, at the end, to do with this shoe.<sup>24</sup> I imagined the shoe being carried from one camp to the next like a “wrong” visitor, without use or meaning. Returning to Benjamin’s harrowing, and simply heartbreaking idea that to “pry an object from its shell is to destroy its aura,” I begin to wonder about the multiplicity and the afterlife of aura. Auratically, this shoe, stolen twice, has

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<sup>21</sup> Daniel Libeskind, “Traces of the Unborn” in *Architecture and Revolution: Contemporary Perspectives on Central and Eastern Europe*, ed. Neil Leach (New York: Routledge, 1999) 127.

<sup>22</sup> Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 257.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> The story continues that the boy, upon his return to the United States, sent the shoe back to Auschwitz. This taking back and then returning locates a mode of redemption, remembering, and collecting in which preservation and destruction are inextricably linked. It also acts as a tear in a historical discourse that propels the discourse forward.

traveled great distances. Like the march, the pile of shoes, using Libeskind's words again, "delineates the invisible on the basis of the visible," so that when the shoe is taken from that mountain, that presence that suggests an absence, a hole is left in a space that already marks a hole. The boy becomes many things at once: collector, destroyer, architect, and finally a new architecture that marks an inerasable trace: the boy's hand reaching out to take the shoe is its own monument. If the hand lifting the shoe up were to be frozen in time and space, like a piece of steel or a block of wood, it becomes for us a wake up call that the collector is complicit in destruction (or prying), yes, but also in a destruction that engenders a new and redemptive architecture, and hence a new dwelling place for a new discourse. However criminal the lifting up of the shoe may seem, the act returns the shoe into a wandering exile. We have to reckon with it again, which reminds us that history really has no final resting place. And isn't to remind, after all, the task of the collector? Isn't to remind the task I have placed before me? Benjamin writes, "To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it 'the way it really was' (Ranke). It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger."<sup>25</sup>

A few weeks after hearing this story and telling it and retelling it, I was told that this story was impossible: the shoes at Auschwitz are behind glass. I began to wonder if in the crisis of witnessing, my brother imagined the shoe being lifted. I called him up:

*Remember the story you told me about the boy who stole a shoe from Auschwitz?*

Yes...

*I was told it was impossible. The shoes are behind glass.*

No. When I was there I remember there was nothing between us.

*Are you certain?*

Maybe they put them behind glass later.

*After 1996?*

Or maybe he took it from Majdanek. It was a long time ago. I forget. It was a strange time. Yes, it was Majdanek. Wait. It's blurry. Can you call them? Can you ask?

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<sup>25</sup> Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 255.

Dislocation becomes even in its telling. Like the shoe, my brother's testimony, at the moment it turns back on itself, at the moment it is dislodged, becomes wounded, paralyzed, and simultaneously asks for a *moving on*. In Testimony: Crisis of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History, Shoshana Felman writes:

To *seek* reality is both to set out to explore the injury inflicted by it – to turn back on, and try to penetrate, the state of being *stricken, wounded* by reality [wirklichkeitswund] – and to attempt, at the same time, to reemerge from the paralysis of this state, to engage reality [Wirklichkeit suchend] as an advent, a movement, and as a vital, critical necessity of *moving on*. It is beyond the shock of being stricken, but nonetheless within the wound and from within the woundedness that the event, incomprehensible though it may be, becomes accessible. The wound gives access to the darkness which the language had to go through and traverse in the very process of its “frightful falling-mute.”<sup>26</sup>

The story about the shoe is wounded. And like the shoe itself, the story is now taken from its grave and put back into circulation. My brother's story now wanders back and forth, in exile, between the imaginary and the real. It is cut off from the comprehension of its surroundings. “Can you call them,” my brother asked. Can you ask?” This request, at the time, seemed very odd. Who exactly would I call? What could I possibly ask? For a moment, I actually considered calling Auschwitz, and in searching for a number I was struck with the absurdity and the grotesqueness of the task, as if there was a single answer to end my searching. And who exactly, in god's name, I wondered, would answer? It is in the story's inability to ever return, its inability to ever be the same after it is “*stricken, wounded*,” that allows for a glimpse into a cut up past.

As I considered all these stories, my influences, these fragments of knowledge, of history, I knew I would begin my mimicry of a *Tsim Tsum* at forgetting. Metaphor and allegory are two devices that enable the familiar to go strange. Metaphor leaves the wounded

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<sup>26</sup> Shoshana Felman, “Education and Crisis” in *Testimony: Crisis of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History*, ed. Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub (New York: Routledge, 1992) 28.

shell behind, and allegory (in its coherence) is nostalgic for a time the shell was whole. What once was bona fide becomes marvel. Even the fact of existence is up for grabs, I mean grabs. Walter B.'s and Beatrice's names echo BE, as in Beatrice's imperative: Be Trice, as in W.B.'s imperative: Double You Be, as in *to be*, as in *becoming*, but they are not entirely yet. Because Walter B. and Beatrice are figures harvested at the center of exile and disorientation, questions of existence and being are crucial. And so they need a home marked by homelessness, where everything is in exile, and where exile is where everything belongs, where emanation and limitation (or retreat and propagation) share the same breath. They need a home like the home the shoe found in that moment the boy lifted it off the mountain made of terror, a home that invites content moved by exile and rocked by doubleness and contradiction, here and there, dream and reality, dislocation and habitation, and escape and refuge. They need a haunted home, a home marked by the same *deja-vu* that housed the broken doll unwrapped on the same day she was wrapped years before. The architecture of the prose poem is the closest form I've found that resembles a home marked by all these things. The prose poem, writes Charles Simic, is "the result of two contradictory impulses, prose and poetry, and therefore cannot exist, but it does."<sup>27</sup>

In a 1934 photograph of Hans Bellmer's *The Doll* she is open at the torso.<sup>28</sup> Where her navel should be is a wheel. Bellmer's plan, although never carried out, was to attach to the wheel a rotating disk, lit by tiny colored bulbs (operated by a button placed on the doll's left nipple), that would contain six wedged shaped scenes: a boat sinking into ice, sweetmeats, a handkerchief dirty with saliva, and several pornographic shots. I often imagine this disk (fixed to where her navel should be) as the perfect image for the prose poem, as both maintain themselves through their doubleness. They both possess a firmly sensed certainty that there

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<sup>27</sup> The dialectic nature of the prose poem is the closest formal cousin to Lautreamont's famous phrase: "Beautiful as the chance meeting of a sewing machine and an umbrella on a dissecting table." It is also reminiscent of Amos Oz's understanding of *tikkun* as a third state where you are offered *either* herring or marmalade and you decide you will have a little of both.

<sup>28</sup> Sue Taylor, *Hans Bellmer: The Anatomy of Anxiety* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2000) 25.

exists a reason, a center, on one hand, and a spinning de-centered randomness on the other. Through this doubleness, the prose poem captures fragments, and makes out of its elusive simultaneity of vision a little monastery – as Bellmer had made for the belly of his doll, as God had made through His vessels that burst, a spinning center out of scraps.

Charles Baudelaire, the prose poem's first pioneer, writes in "The Stranger" (the first prose poem in *Paris Spleen* (1855-1867)) of an "enigmatical man" who when asked who he loves best – his father, his mother, his sister, or his brother – replies that he has none. When he is asked about his country he replies he does not even know "in what latitude" his country lies. He only loves, he replies, the clouds "...up there...up there..."<sup>29</sup> Like Baudelaire's stranger who cannot be interrupted by the interior boundaries of his origin, like the world of orphans *Tsim Tsum* leaves over, like the one who is only claimed by the nebulous, the prose poem breaks the poem free from the formalistic interruptions of the line break. The prose poem – "that cannot exist, but it does" – must begin (out of the sheerness of its form) in a state of marvel. Baudelaire, in his preface to *Paris Spleen*, admits that the idea of the prose poem is a haunting one, and that it came to him while exploring the city and "the medley of its innumerable interrelations."<sup>30</sup> This idea of haunt engendered by the dissolution of the line break remains a very potent mark of the prose poem. To free a poem of its line break is to free a poem of its breath. The space on the right hand side of the page is gone, as is the possibility for escape. The prose poem is a box free of interior borders (as in, the line break), but it's struck with exterior borders that square it. The images inside the prose poem, like the images on Bellmer's disk, like the shards of light, and like the images of the unconscious unbothered by formulaic breaks, cohere like allegory coheres with the feeling that something has been left behind or carved away. Something like breath. The breath, of course, still resides in the prose poem but as a long, wondrous inhale. Like a lung, or a vessel, filling up with air and light.

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<sup>29</sup> Charles Baudelaire, *Paris Spleen*, trans. By Louise Varese (New York: New Directions Books, 1947) 1.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, x.

This inhalation is at the center of the prose poem's haunted nature, for what is haunt if not a breathing thing caught inside the house, or the body, or the box without the possibility of exit? Any exit strategy, any possibility for an exhalation, is plotted through the interior. Movement turns marsupial. The prose poem is an abyss, a shell, a vessel that captures a howl that echoes ghosts (those figures who circle exile and return). Here, like in the first moments of a *Tsim Tsum*, emanation and limitation share the same breath. And it is this space where Walter B. and Beatrice can begin to speak.

I have a photograph of Walter B. and Beatrice that is simply a picture of a long dirt road. Along the path there are places where orange flowers once grew. At night I collect water and food and air, which I wrap in brown paper. When I find this road I will leave the package there for Walter B. and Beatrice. The road is called *Mist Must*. No one has ever been there, least of all Beatrice. Least of all, Walter B.



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I

*say goodbye – a banquet – the last bite of fish -- the timbrelist – the thief –  
an egg filled with red sugar – disasters – goat song – a booth –  
between worlds*

## **The Departure**

“You do not know anymore,” sighed Walter B., “what is real.”  
“Goodbye,” said Beatrice. “Goodbye,” said Walter B.  
“Goodbye,” said Beatrice. “Goodbye,” said Walter B. “Where  
will you go?” asked Beatrice. “To the banquet,” said Walter B.  
Beatrice stared at him. She wished he would break like the sky  
once did and drown her in flowers. “Weren’t we once,” asked  
Beatrice softly, “a little like a banquet?” “You do not know  
anymore,” sighed Walter B., “what is real.” Walter B. and  
Beatrice stood in the dark. They held hands, and watched the  
wagons pass by. Walter B. was not in any of them. “Goodbye,”  
said Beatrice. “Goodbye,” said Walter B. “Goodbye,” said  
Beatrice. “Goodbye,” said Walter B. “Where will you go?”  
asked Beatrice. “To the banquet,” said Walter B. Behind them  
the horses were slowly gathering in the frozen field. “Weren’t  
we once,” asked Beatrice softly, “a little like a banquet?” “You  
do not know anymore,” sighed Walter B., “what is real.”  
“Goodbye,” said Beatrice. “Goodbye,” said Walter B.  
“Goodbye,” said Beatrice. “Goodbye,” said Walter B. “Where  
will you go?” asked Beatrice. “To the banquet,” said Walter B.  
Walter B. and Beatrice stood in the dark. They held hands, and  
watched the wagons pass by. Walter B. was not in any of them.  
“Goodbye,” said Beatrice. “Goodbye,” said Walter B.  
“Goodbye,” said Beatrice. “Goodbye,” said Walter B.

## **Walter B. Needs Some Time**

When Walter B., one evening, explained to Beatrice that he “needed time,” Beatrice pulled the last bite of fish from Walter B.’s mouth and shook it at him. She wished he had said instead that he needed a timbrel, and off they would have gone together to the spectacle where the timbrelist often played. But Walter B. did not need a timbrel. Walter B. “needed time.” So Beatrice wrapped what was left of the fish in a red wool cloth and set out to find him some. It was cold outside. If I was time, wondered Beatrice, where would I be? She watched the humans in the distance breathe into the grass. If I was time, wondered Beatrice, how would I remind myself of where I was? She held the last bite of fish up to her mouth for warmth. It began to feel heavy in her hands. She wished he had said instead that he needed a timbrel. She wished she was for Walter B. the time he needed. But she was not. She unwrapped the last bite of fish and studied it. It reminded her of a world inside of which Walter B. was mostly gone. She rubbed her arms with it. She buried her face in it. It began to grow around her like a soft, white house. It grew, and it grew, until at last Beatrice was inside. She slowly walked through its rooms. In the first room, a pile of shovels. In the second, a pitcher of milk. When she stepped inside the third, Walter B. and the timbrelist were helping each other on with their coats. “If you were time,” called out Walter B., “where would you be?” Before Beatrice could answer, Walter B. saluted her, took the timbrelist by the hand, and left her alone in the soft, white house. Beatrice sat on the floor. Much later she would drink from the pitcher of milk. She would lean against the pile of shovels. But for now all Beatrice could do was sit on the floor. She would sit on the floor of the soft, white house until she grew hungry again for Walter B.’s last bite of fish.

## **The Definition of a Thief**

Walter B., as he rummaged through Beatrice's blouse pockets, asked her carefully what the word "thief" meant. He had heard this word before. Once in the great field. And once in the kitchen. It felt like a word with great distance. For years it had already seemed too late to ask. But not with Beatrice. Not now. With Beatrice he could ask anything. Gently removing his hands, as he had once removed hers, Beatrice said "it is an instance, Walter B., of carrying away something that is not yours to carry away. For example," she continued, "if I am carried away by an idea, this idea becomes for me a thief. I become nothing, in this instance, but a stolen object. I comb my hair and eat my breakfast only in the realm of this idea. To be a thief, Walter B., and this is the most important part, to be a thief means to be a person who is only able to be an existing idea if he or she carries away and then dwells in another. Do you understand?" she asked. But Walter B. had stopped listening. He was staring at Beatrice's mouth. As if he could reach inside it and pull out a long gray hair. Or an egg filled with red sugar.

## The Disasters

Beatrice decided it was time to commodify her disasters. She spread each one out on the floor and studied them. Some would open. Some would not. Outside, the humans sailed past each other like thin discarded boats. Beatrice lifted each disaster up to the light. The rustle of a faraway fairground hung in the air. “If only,” thought Beatrice, “I could make from one of these a profit I would be saved.” Some chirped happily. Some were in no mood to be touched. Walter B. listened from the other room. “What are you doing in there, my little shipwreck?” “Commodifying my disasters,” said Beatrice. “That’s nice,” said Walter B. “Will you need some batteries?” “No,” said Beatrice. “Better save the batteries for the children.” The Collector arrived at the door. Walter B. sent him away. Beatrice counted her disasters. 174. They were all accustomed to the best of care. “If only,” thought Beatrice, “I had a cart.” But she did not have a cart. “Not since Poland,” Walter B. reminded her. “If only,” thought Beatrice, “I had a kiosk.” But she did not have a kiosk either. Beatrice sat with her disasters all evening. “How can I wrap these beautiful creatures in paper,” Beatrice wondered, “and send them off for a price?” Beatrice felt disheveled. The Collector arrived at the door. Walter B. sent him away. From far off, Beatrice could hear the humans getting tangled in their blankets. Walter B. cautiously stepped over Beatrice’s disasters. “I regret,” he said, “your desire to commodify.” He pulled Beatrice onto his lap. “For one,” he continued looking around, “this may be our only hope for a family. And for second, look how closely they resemble us.” Some yawned. Some bristled with difficulty. Others were telling stories about their times in the woods. Beatrice looked around. She knew she would have to keep them. Walter B. rocked Beatrice gently. He kissed her in the middle of her sleepy face. “It really is astonishing,” said Walter B., overflowing with pride, “what you with all my love have made.” Some were crawling into their bed. Others had already begun to sing The Goat Song.

## **The Reality Testing Booth**

At the Reality Testing Booth, or as Beatrice liked to say, “at the Reality Testing Boof,” Beatrice and Walter B. had a realization. It was almost morning. They brought with them four things to test: hat, love, day, and the delectable. Each test required a small gold token. They were a little scared. Walter B. only had enough for three, and Beatrice, well Beatrice, she was all out of small gold tokens. It was strange to choose, but it seemed only right to first test an object, so they held the hat up first and waited for the printout. They waited for a long time. They waited for hours. And then they waited for days. It was a long, long wait, this waiting. Walter B. began, in this waiting, to speak of “the objective evaluation of situations that enable one to distinguish between the external and internal worlds and between the self and the nonself.” Beatrice listened. She listened carefully, and as she listened she began to grow very fond of Walter B. As if it was actually he who was the love that made each of her days delectable.



## II

*debacle – twirled and twirled – these babies were not the same babies –  
door slam – very far away – at the assembly – whoop and holler – fork or a spoon –  
the horse – good luck – revenge – forgive*

## **Beatrice Takes a Lover**

“I am taking a lover,” Beatrice announced, flipping through the phone book procreatively. “And where exactly,” asked Walter B. fussing with his fur collar, “will you be taking this lover?” “To the debacle, Walter B.” Walter B. was miffed. “You are being, Beatrice, neither relevant nor sensible.” Beatrice felt warned. She felt like she should cook for Walter B. some soup tonight in fairly graphic detail. “Why,” asked Walter B., brushing the fur off his neck, “to the debacle?” Beatrice thought for a moment. She considered the beauty of Walter B.’s ruin. “Because I want,” said Beatrice, “some astonishment.” “What in god’s name,” asked Walter B., “is wanting some astonishment?” Beatrice began to worry she had read the wrong book. She went into the yard which she often did when she felt unsure. Walter B. followed. “Astonishment, Walter B.,” continued Beatrice staring at the ground, “is when you take a lover to the debacle.” “I see,” said Walter B. He began to reconsider his position. He knew somewhere deep in Beatrice’s heart that this was not terrific. He knew that this was very, very far from terrific. He wanted very much to unbutton her blouse. He wanted to touch her thighs in a way neither Beatrice nor Walter B. would later remember. “And furthermore, Walter B.,” Beatrice continued, “I have been feeling, lately, like a scene of simplicity.” “But why not take a lover,” asked Walter B., “to a field or to a bridge or to mother’s. Why,” he moaned, “to the debacle?” “Because of god,” said Beatrice. Walter B. could hardly believe his ears. He could hardly believe this wonderful turn of events. Beatrice would take a lover to the debacle because of god! “You have made me, sweet Beatrice, very, very happy. Happier, in fact, than I have ever been in my entire life. So happy, in fact, that I would like to twirl.” “So twirl,” said Beatrice, feeling, at last, very pleased with herself. And so Walter B. twirled. He twirled, and he twirled, and he twirled. He twirled until there was no twirling left in the whole wide world.

## **Where Babies Come From**

“Where,” asked Beatrice, “do babies come from?” Walter B. was hanging a painting in the crawl space. It was a painting of the babies. “Basically,” said Walter B., “babies come from rubbing babies together. They rub and they rub. Once, I heard them rubbing.” “Are you sure those are the babies where babies come from?” asked Beatrice. She was staring at the painting. It was a painting of the babies. Walter B. stepped back. “They seem,” said Beatrice, “to be different babies.” Walter B. tilted his head. A door slammed. They stood for a long time and examined the painting. Beatrice was right. These were not the same babies. These were different babies. Some of these babies carried twine. These were not the babies where babies came from. Some of these babies were not rubbing. Some of these babies had books about babies tucked under their arms. These were not the same babies. These babies would never be the babies where babies came from. These babies were different. And Beatrice was the first to call their bluff.

## **Aster**

According to Walter B., an “aster” denotes “something that imperfectly resembles or mimics the true thing.” When he says this he is alphabetizing the appliances: Beater, Coffee Maker, Mixer, Spatula, Toaster. Beatrice reminds him, from between the beater and the coffee maker, that “aster” is also a combining form with the meaning “star.” Sometimes these reminders seem very, very far away. Does this mean, wonders Walter B. distantly, that there is only to resemble “the true thing?” That there is only to be reminded of the star from between what once seemed like a beautiful assemblage of order? “No,” says Beatrice, brushing the feathers off his dear, dear head. Beatrice likes to think of herself in all of Walter B.'s disastrous places.

## The Marks of Walter B.'s Power

At the assembly, Walter B. listed for Beatrice the marks of his power. "One," he began, "'delight,' two 'refusal,' three 'blockage,' four 'the momentous event'..." "The momentous event?" interrupted Beatrice. "Yes," said Walter B., "the momentous event." Walter B. turned the page. "Now," he asked, "where was I?" "You were," said Beatrice, "at the momentous event." The humans began to file into the auditorium. Walter B. waited for them to take their seats and then he continued. "Five 'immanence,' six 'surrender'..." At "surrender" there was a whoop from the back of the room, and then there was a holler. Walter B. blushed and then he continued. "Seven 'possession'..." "For this momentous event," interrupted Beatrice, "there was a broadcast?" Walter B. was not getting out of Beatrice's interruptions a kick. "Owing to the intimate nature of the momentous event," sighed Walter B., "there was no broadcast." "Not even a flier?" asked Beatrice. "No," said Walter B., "not even a flier." Weeping filled the room. It was becoming too clear to Walter B. that Beatrice had forgotten how to listen to his litany without deep feelings of exclusion. Nevertheless, he continued. "Eight 'enchantment,' nine 'evasion'..." "Not even," asked Beatrice, "a hint? Not even," asked Beatrice with her last shred, "a clue?" The humans threw their heads back and closed their eyes. Walter B. turned his notes over and stared at Beatrice. "What would you like," asked Walter B., "for me to tell you? That it was a night of eternal bliss and fear?" "That would be nice," said Beatrice, "for starters." "Fine," said Walter B. "It was a night of eternal bliss and fear." Beatrice gasped. She began to tremble with disgrace. The humans began to quickly file out of the auditorium. They swore never to speak of the assembly again, and they swore to forgive each other for what they now knew. They swore to look away when they would, years later, come across Beatrice in her yard with her spools, and her lights, and her dust, trying to build for Walter B. the exact momentous event he once attended without her. And although they knew not to watch Beatrice as she measured and sawed, they often thought back to that day at the assembly and wondered, hopelessly, if the tenth mark of Walter B.'s power was Beatrice.

## **Forgiveness**

Walter B. had an idea. He would arrive at the door in a white linen suit with scarlet cuffs and beg for Beatrice's forgiveness. Should he bring for her a fork or a spoon? He could not decide. He would ask the horse.

The horse thought the spoon. But the spoon, the spoon, would remind her of the pudding. And the pudding would remind her of the babies. And the babies (the horse did not yet know this) would remind Beatrice of the baking sheet she held above her head as she ran, and ran, and ran far into the city. He should have, like the babies, run along beside her. But the horse thought the spoon. Walter B.'s hands stiffened. Beatrice would be back any minute. He removed the fork and the spoon from the pocket of his white linen suit and shook them for good luck. One for now, he decided. And one for later. He began to feel brave. Should he beg for Beatrice's forgiveness, he wondered, or should he take on her revenge? He could not decide. He would ask the horse.

The horse thought revenge. But revenge (the horse did not yet know this) would remind Beatrice of forgiveness...

III

*soldiers dressed like children – candy – a large black bird –  
prayer – they once were beautiful – Poland – an illustrated book – sliced apples –  
the suspicion of the town*

## **The Traitor**

A few days before the first snow the soldiers dressed like children began to appear. "Come quick," said Beatrice, fetching Walter B. away from his scripture, "and bring candy!" Walter B. pulled on his robe and joined Beatrice on the balcony. "Oh look," said Beatrice, "you can see their small, sweet eyes peeking through the bramble." Walter B. threw a handful of red gumdrops into the air and watched the soldiers dressed like children scatter, and raise their arms in glee. "Feels sinful, doesn't it?" purred Beatrice. They watched them stand in the field and chew. "Which one," asked Walter B., "do you think is the hero?" "That one," said Beatrice. "Definitely that one. The one with the mittens." "Yes," agreed Walter B., "the others seem less... festooned." "And which one do you think," asked Walter B., "is the traitor?" Beatrice bit her lip and looked around. "Maybe that one," she said. "The one with the orange flower in the pocket of his vest." Walter B. agreed, but to be certain he thought that he should ask. "Little traitor," called out Walter B. The traitor looked up. "I knew it!" said Beatrice, clapping her hands. The traitor came closer. The wind shook the orange flower loose from his pocket, but he did not run after it. He missed his mother. The traitor came closer, but then he stopped. He curled into his flowerless vest and fell asleep. Walter B. and Beatrice yawned. The soldiers dressed like children opened their mouths as wide as they could, but there was no more candy. There would never again be more candy. And so they sailed away to another land.



### **Cryptozoology**

Like many translated biological terms, “Beatrice” lacks the connotative impact of its foreign original. Essentially an ideological term, “Beatrice” refers to a small, poorly lit room where paintings of Beatrice are haphazardly displayed. When Beatrice explained this to Walter B. one night, without warning, Walter B. was so relieved he slept in his boots. It was as if this secret Beatrice no longer kept lifted from Walter B.'s arms a large black bird as heavy as Beatrice. “Many of the paintings,” continued Beatrice, “suggest scenes of yard play gone awry. Like this one over here,” she said pointing to one where a rake is nestled lovingly against her cheek. “Other paintings depict me as frothy,” she continued. “Like that one,” she said spinning around the small room as if it was a room she once owned. “See how frothy I am, Walter B., and how confidently I clutch a smaller Beatrice.” Why exactly the smaller Beatrice Beatrice clutched wore lipstick and dark knee socks, and why there was a barren tree nearby, Walter B. was too excited to ask. If Walter B. could have climbed inside that painting and slept against the two Beatrices, forever, he would have.

### **Beatrice Writes A Letter to a Magazine**

“Dear Magazine, in your last issue you list the 50 most beautiful, but how could you forget the cellar door, the Walter B., one year before his death the clawfoot tub, the ruse, the green balloon, to sing The Goat Song is very beautiful. Dear Magazine, the harvest too. To say a word is beautiful. In your last issue you forget I knelt beside the sandwich cart and prayed. Was it deliberate you left the babies out, or by mistake? The booth, the signup sheet, the woods are all so goddamn beautiful and you forget. And I forget out of which banquet did you stumble from, dear Magazine. You forget how beautiful the banquet was.”

Beatrice looked up from her letter. She studied the notes Walter B. prepared for her. She applied to her lips the ointment, and continued:

“Dear Magazine, and also you forget herself. For example, last night I bit into a nuptial. It had a cherry filling. I licked the sides and threw the wrapper out. You forget how beautiful the wrapper was. And you forget I once and am still now inside the house where all the animals are neatly tagged. They are so neatly tagged. They once were beautiful, too. We beg for a correction. You forget how beautifully we beg. And so on. And so forth. You frighten my heart with your racket. Thank you for your consideration. Love, Beatrice.”

## **Poland**

Beatrice used for the first time today the word “Poland.” As in, “Walter B., we are not in Poland.” As soon as Beatrice used the word once, she could not for the life of her stop. Not, at least, with Walter B. standing like that with his mouth open. She did not know, at first, if saying the word like she did was a doom or a place to kneel. As in, “hold me here while I am still not in Poland.” Historically, she could not say it to Walter B. enough. Even when Beatrice saw that Walter B. had begun to feel harmed by the word, she curled up very small on the sofa and whispered into her knees, “take, for me, the babies back to Poland.” She was beginning, by now, to feel beside herself. Something on Walter B.'s face began to look as though he had had enough. But of what he had had enough, Beatrice pretended not know. “Poland?” she asked. “Have you had enough of Poland?” They were beginning, very quickly, not to understand each other. They were beginning to feel as though they were in Poland. Not like lovers, as they had once, in Poland, hoped to be, but like children wearing very, very bright colors. Two children pulling, like horses, a cart. They began to feel as though something very small and very alive was among them in this cart. “Something...like Poland?” Beatrice asked. Walter B., by now, was furious. He decided, once and for all, to see what very small and very alive thing was among them. He left Beatrice alone to hold up the cart, while he went to see for himself the thing that had come between them. The thing they were, like horses, pulling. Beatrice began to feel very beautiful and very real holding the cart up by herself as she did. A few minutes later Walter B. returned with a thin layer of sawdust covering his lips. “Was it Poland?” Beatrice asked. “No,” said Walter B., slowing disappearing. “It never really was.”

## **The Town**

It was time, decided Walter B., to make out of Beatrice a secret. He would need a town. He would need for this town a population. He felt someone watching him. If it is the population watching me, thought Walter B., I'm well on my way. If it is Beatrice, remembered Walter B., she is of no concern. He put on the hood, squinted, and waved. "We're so lucky," one of them said. Walter B. looked at the instructions. First, he should tie to Beatrice's trousers a long rope, and to the rope he should tie a message: "to whom," it should read, "belongs this." He couldn't think to shoot her. It is similar with hawks and babies, but it is even more similar with Beatrice. No one ever thinks to shoot her. "I love," whispered Beatrice, "the government archives." And she was not the only one. "Shhh..." warned Walter B. Beatrice began to feel discreet. She began to walk with a stoop not like a thief, but like a thief in an illustrated book of thieves. "Now," said Walter B., "we're getting somewhere." And somewhere they were getting. "There are so few of us here," said Beatrice surveying the town. And where they were getting Beatrice was scarce. Walter B. rejoiced. He prepared for Beatrice a plate of beef apples. He sliced them cautiously so as not to arouse the suspicion of the town.

IV

*if it occurs in winter it is called The Babies – gifts –  
ecstasy – the ninth stage – delivery – where organs come from –  
a mistake – a field – nurses – mice – laughter*

## **The 10 Stages of Beatrice**

Stage 1. -- Belonging.

In the first stage Beatrice is precisely labeled and timed. She is able to devise complex graphs, answer questions in the order that they're asked, and construct coherent narratives without nostalgia or actual fear. There is no display of loud sobbing, nor are there visions.

Stage 2.-- Happy.

Beatrice, during the second stage, believes she is alive. The possibility that she is not alive, in this stage, never enters her mind. This stage is only possible if the spectacle comes to town.

Stage 3. -- Walter B.

This stage is also called “the latch stage.” It is Beatrice at her most historical and strange.

Stage 4. -- Romance.

Beatrice is hunted, captured, and softly strung to a tree. In this stage words are used to intoxicate, supply, and deceive. These words are rarely interesting. Gifts are exchanged that are of no use.

Stage 5. -- Dread.

Beatrice is covered in feathers and twigs. She believes she is a nest. This stage, if it occurs in winter, is also called “The Babies.”

Stage 6. -- Slice.

The sixth stage often appears in Beatrice's hand like a long instrument with a blade at the end. She will eat cake, during this stage, until she has visions.

Stage 7. -- Cryptozoology.

In the seventh stage Beatrice wears a green dress with large white pockets in which to store the evidence. If this stage is mingled with the second stage, ecstasy is achieved.

Stage 8. -- Crowded.

Beatrice is behind glass. In this stage Beatrice is blurred by the humans who observe her without caution.

Stage 9. -- Poland.

Beatrice gathers her grandfather into her arms. She recites him from his memory. The ninth stage sounds like this: *tsim tsum, tsim tsum, tsim tsum.*

Stage 10. -- Return.

In the final stage Beatrice watches Beatrice feed the babies with a spade.

### **The Delivery**

In our pressed brown suit we deliver the document to Beatrice and Walter B. The document glows in our hand. We take three steps and we are where they are cutting up smocks. For luck, we figure. He is up to her knees in rust and mink. She is up to his knees, as per his instructions. If we could fold the document up inside her pale mouth. If we could remove the black canister from her arms. If we were kind we would. He holds her up to the light. "Reminds you of a pharmacy, doesn't she?" And she does. She reminds us of a pharmacy.



## **The Organization**

“If we ever want to know, Walter B., where our organs have come from, we will have to join the organization.” Beatrice explains this to Walter B. as she climbs down from where he had once held her to the light. “For too long, Walter B., we have believed our organs have come to us from the forest, and I am beginning to fear they have not.” Walter B. tried very hard to remember. Had their organs arrived with the scent of mud or insects or leaves? Or had they arrived from somewhere else? He once read that some organs arrive sweet and wirey, while others arrive dark and soft. He could not remember how their organs had arrived. They would have to join the organization. The recently delivered document asked that they sign their names at the bottom. They would have to conform to the standards, rules, and demands of the organization if they ever wanted to know from where their organs had come. In an instance like this, Walter B. believed that Beatrice knew what was best. According to the document they would have to empty their house of their oldest animal. They would have to brush their doorpost with its leftover fur. “It is a sorrowful thing to join an organization,” explained Beatrice as she led their oldest animal out from where it had been kept so long. “But it must, I am afraid, be done.” Walter B. nodded. Beatrice blushed. And why exactly she blushed, Walter B. would not find out until later that evening.

## The Mistake

A mistake had been made. “Should we shoot it?” asked Walter B. “Of course,” sighed Beatrice, “we should not shoot it.” It stood in the long grass and blinked at them. “Where do you think,” asked Beatrice, “it came from.” “From the debacle, I suppose,” is all Walter B. said. And then he considered, “or maybe from the babies.” Beatrice tugged at her sleeves. A mistake had been made, and now Walter B. and Beatrice had on their hands a situation. “How,” asked Walter B., “do you suppose such a mistake had been made?” The mistake began to pose, as if it heard him. It staggered across the field. For a moment it looked like a woman bent over nothing in particular. And then it rose. And then it opened its mouth. “Oh, look,” exclaimed Beatrice, “it’s *communicating!*” “Is it alone?” whispered Walter B., taking Beatrice’s hand. “Yes,” Beatrice whispered back, “I think it is alone.” But it was not alone. It was not alone at all. Others began to emerge. Some from the trees. Some from the grass. Their damp white mouths flashed in the sunlight. “Had I known a little ahead of time,” said Walter B., “I would have changed into my suit.” “Yes,” agreed Beatrice, “we should have arrived more prepared.” “This is exactly what,” said Walter B. raising his voice, and pointing at the scene in front of them, “I had been trying to explain to you. And now we are in a situation without any rope.” “Pardon me,” said Beatrice. And she began to walk into the field. Slowly, at first. And then faster. And then she began to run. She ran with her arms outstretched, as one might run into a field filled with mothers.

## The Joke

What didn't kill Beatrice that winter made her funnier. She was wounded, yes, but she was funnier. Victory was hers. She hobbled home, past the wagons climbing with nurses. Past the beautiful trees. "Ah," cried Walter B., "my voluptuous goat has returned from battle! My sugar packet is back from the front!" He waved an empty flag. "Sit, sit," said Walter B. "I'll garnish a roast." Beatrice opened with an old joke. She was like a riot. Walter B. beamed. He laughed and he laughed. Her wounds were startling, but her jokes were *transcendent*. She tore her gunnysack open for a tender punchline. A dirty punchline. A punchline to end all punchlines, as the soldiers say. Walter B. turned the oven on high and guffawed. It was a hot afternoon. Too sunny to tell one nurse from another. But the nurses were there. Oh, they were there. They huddled at the window. Hundreds of them. Maybe thousands. They scratched at the door. Someone should have let them in. But who? Who could hear them above all that laughter? They were sweating now. Gleaming. They scrambled over each other like mice. They were pounding. Thumping. Thumping nurses. Beatrice had just begun a new joke when she noticed one had gotten in. A large one. A large nurse. A large laughing nurse. But why was she laughing? Even Walter B. knew it was too soon to tell how this joke would end.

V

*imagination – a hopeless little thing – a large cashew – too much life –  
The Oldest Animal – a letter home – byrds – a machine – hope –  
The Unlikelies – genuine concern*

## **On the Way to Mist Must**

“Where are we?” asked Beatrice. “We are very close,” said Walter B. They stared steadily ahead. “Where is very close?” asked Beatrice. “It is right before,” said Walter B., “we get there.” Beatrice’s imagination zoomed past them in a white fur coat. “There it goes again,” sighed Beatrice, “running wild.” It somersaulted twice then charged into the distance. “Get back here,” hollered Walter B. He wrung his hands. He stomped his feet. “I’d like to give that good-for-nothing a piece of my mind,” he grumbled. But Beatrice’s imagination was running wild. It hurtled back and stared Walter B. in the face. It mocked a yawn. “You are a hopeless little thing!” cursed Walter B. Beatrice’s imagination stopped. It looked cautiously around as if it knew something about the world the world would never know. Then it bounded away. “Should we catch up?” asked Beatrice, buttoning her sweater. “We should not,” warned Walter B., “catch up.” “Where are we?” asked Beatrice. “We are very close,” said Walter B. “Where is very close?” asked Beatrice. “It is right before,” said Walter B., “we get there.” The sign up the road read “Mist Must.” Beatrice’s imagination leaned against the sign, and nibbled on a large cashew. “Oh goody,” clapped Beatrice. “It’s already there. And with provisions!” Walter B. trembled. For years he was brave enough to come this close. Wasn’t that enough, he wondered. Maybe it was for Beatrice. Maybe it was, he muttered to himself, until her imagination showed up in a white fur coat with a cashew large enough for everyone.

## **The Preservation**

“What is this thing,” asked Beatrice, “to overfloweth?” It was late August. Walter B. and Beatrice were reading from *The Collector’s Cautionary Tale* when to Beatrice this question occurred. “To overfloweth, Beatrice,” explained Walter B. in a hatched voice neither Walter B. nor Beatrice had ever heard before, “is to deposit too much life into either the babies or Poland.” Beatrice thought for a moment. She thought about The Collector. She thought about his grammar. She thought about caution. She wanted very much to overfloweth. “How, specifically,” asked Beatrice, motioning in The Collector who had gathered by the door to listen, “does a human overfloweth?” Walter B. began to think about preservation. He thought if only he could apply it, like earth, to her body. If only The Collector had not brought with him an answer, he could keep Beatrice from depositing too much life. Too much life, he had decided years ago, should not by Beatrice ever be deposited.

## **The Oldest Animal Writes a Letter Home**

To That Mutter and That Fodder:

It is of the upmosty imports that I wrotted you concernping the whereabouts of That Mutter''s amangination. I seep it daily runnING to and froth. Something is wrong wif it? Why does it says a revolupshun is in order as it rubs its teers away wif the grasses? Was it That Mutter who is alpsso called Be Trice who hath given it the wifir coat it sheds all over the Foryst and the Skyys? That same Mutter who hath given me all the outside parts of the whirld? On a certain evening when I was scayred, That Mutter''s amangination really brought me the herrings and the marmalades. We ated all of it ups under the moops and the starps. In de mouf the herrings and the marmalades taysted like wyrdy scraped auf the bones of That Mutter if she is misting me. That Mutter''s A. laffed, and laffed, when I said that idear out lord. That Mutter''s A. laffed so open I could seep into its mouf all the way down to the inside of its feats. A gastling wynd shakes from there. Even I (The Oldest Animal) can hear the ghasstling wynd sayeth all my thinks at once. Remember when That Fodder who is alpsso called Double You Be said That Mutter''s A. should stand in the corner and think about what it did? What does it do? Nuffing, mostling. Except for all the wynds. And the herrings. And the marmalades. Hencefroth and overwise, I am so farfetched. Especially regardlings all the signage pointing to the factuals that I (The Oldest Animal) am no longer wif visinnitee to That Mutter and That Fodder who is you. I am oldyr than PoLand today, but not more sadly. You did no me once, didn't you? Please send byrds.

Sincerply,

The Oldest Animal, (sighted in contents).

## **Birthday**

Coincidentally, today is Beatrice's birthday. And why exactly this is, Walter B. would never know. Nevertheless, he knew it was up to him to make for Beatrice a machine. A machine like the machine they once imagined the other inside. A machine with strings and wires and peculiar linoleum doors. Walter B. thought for a moment. He felt lucky. He felt like a man in a four dollar room who suddenly had had a good idea. He would use all of his instruments. It would be a machine that would mingle their forecast. And except for the wires, it would be nothing like Poland.



## **All is Fair in Love and War**

“Who is Beatrice,” wondered Walter B., “to give Beatrice up her hope?” Beatrice sulked under her cauliflower-colored hat. “It is like,” said Beatrice, “I can barely crack another joke.” “That is correct,” said Walter B. “It is most certainly like that. Nevertheless whoever you are it is not up to you to give up your hope. And additionally you are spoiling the day.” “What is ‘giving up your hope’?” asked Beatrice. “It is when,” explained Walter B., “you have to ask.”

\*

It all began with the appearance of The Unlikelies. It was difficult to anticipate in these small men sitting cross-legged on the living room floor the havoc they would bring. They held hands. They sang a song about trees, and as they sang their tree-shaped ears swelled with what Beatrice would later describe as pride. They asked for gently-steamed vegetables. They seemed genuinely concerned. “Pick a heart,” they cheered, “any heart.” Beatrice picked one. “Except for that one.” Beatrice picked another. “And that one, too.” “That was less joyous,” said Beatrice, “than I’d expected.” “The hearts you picked,” explained The Unlikelies, “had been picked yesterday.” “It is unlikely,” said The Unlikelies, “that will happen again.” Walter B. hid in the kitchen. Whose side The Unlikelies were on, Beatrice began to wonder. “Pick a heart,” they urged. Beatrice picked another. “Except for that one.” Beatrice picked another. “And that one, too.” With each heart Beatrice picked The Unlikelies grew larger. They seemed genuinely concerned. “All is dare,” they reminded Beatrice with their mouths full of broccoli, and carrots, and peas, “in blur and core.” By dawn, Walter B. could still hear Beatrice picking hearts. Their empty husks filled the floor. The Unlikelies huddled closer together. “Except for that one,” they mumbled sleepily moving closer to the door. The Unlikelies were, by now, as big as the furniture. “And that one, too.” Walter B. hid in the kitchen. He imagined he would make out of all the husks a hearty soup. He rummaged for a pot. He would feed Beatrice the soup, drop by drop, until she forgot this highly unlikely event impossible to foresee by any hopeful thing. “All is spare in buds and more,” promised The Unlikelies, as they squeezed their enormous bodies out the door.

\*

Days later, when Beatrice asked Walter B. if The Unlikelies were still standing outside in the sunlight, congratulating each other, Walter B. said “no.” But Beatrice knew they were there. And she knew they would return for her. They seemed genuinely concerned.

VI

*a sermon – a secret – no one to talk to – a visit –  
two dead flowers – something beautiful is going to happen –  
the letter B. -- an interview – every scent in the house -- Abigail – was she no different*

## The Drawing

Walter B. hurled a plum at his congregants, looked unsure, and began his sermon. “I stand before you today because I am secretly...” He paused, sat down on the pulpit, and unwrapped a second plum. His congregants flinched. Walter B. took a bite. Beatrice sat in the second row. She drew a pond on her lunchbag. Beside the pond she drew a nurse, and beside the nurse, on the wet ground, she drew a plum. And leaning over the plum she drew Walter B. “I stand before you today,” resumed Walter B., “because I am secretly...” Beatrice considered drawing a shed, but would there be ramifications? Perhaps too many. With each bite Walter B. seemed closer to the pit. Nevertheless Beatrice felt brave. She drew the shed, and as she drew her small dark mouth opened a slice. “Like a plum,” whispered one congregant to another. The congregants flinched. Capturing a scene was beginning to feel more difficult than Beatrice had imagined. In order for Walter B. to look like a real Walter B., she would need to draw action. Should Walter B. move closer to the shed? Was the plum distracting? “...because I am secretly...” resumed Walter B. He rocked back and forth. He coughed. He took another bite. The congregants were beginning to drift off to sleep. How could he put this, he wondered. In order for Walter B. to look like a real Walter B. he would need a purpose. Maybe the nurse is lost. Maybe there is something about the nurse Walter B. likes. Something to do with the way she is eerily staring into the pond. And where is Beatrice, wondered Beatrice. She is in the shed. There would be ramifications. In order for Walter B. to look like a real Walter B. he would need to approach the nurse and speak to her until one thing led to another. “I stand before you today...” resumed Walter B., but how could he go on. How could he go on without hurting Beatrice? Poor plumless Beatrice with no one to talk to but the chickens in the shed. But there were no chickens. Which was why, when the sermon was over, and the congregants gathered around to study the drawing they agreed unanimously that the scene was not believable.

### **Walter B.'s Extraordinary Cousin Arrives for a Visit**

When Walter B.'s Extraordinary Cousin arrived for a visit, Beatrice and Walter B. were in the bath reciting scenes from their favorite sentences. "What's that?" asked Beatrice, pointing at the thin white hands reaching in through the window. "Oh," said Walter B., "that's my extraordinary cousin." Beatrice and Walter B. continued to recite, but it wasn't the same. "Should we lend him a bicycle," whispered Beatrice. "Should I cook for him an egg?" "No," said Walter B., "we do not have time for his particulars." "Go away!" shouted Walter B. with a splash. "Go away!" Walter B.'s Extraordinary Cousin dropped his hands over the ledge like two dead flowers. "We haven't the time for your threats, or your untouchable thighs," shouted Walter B. "Can't you see we are trying to make a living here?" And with that Walter B.'s Extraordinary Cousin was gone. "Thank heavens that's over with," sighed Walter B. relaxing back into the warm water. "He has already cost me the earth." Six days went by undisturbed. But on the seventh day Walter B.'s Extraordinary Cousin returned. His thin white hands reached in again through the window. "What's that?" asked Beatrice. "Oh," said Walter B., "that's my extraordinary cousin." "I see," said Beatrice with the feeling that something like this had happened once before. "Go away!" shouted Walter B. "Go away!" shouted Beatrice. "Go away!" shouted Walter B.'s Extraordinary Cousin. It was not yet time to drain the bathwater. It would be years before it would be time to drain the bathwater. And it would be longer still before it would be known far and wide that those hands were draped in accusations even Walter B. could not forgive.

## **The Oldest Animal Writes a Letter Home**

To That Mutter and That Fodder:

You never sendd byrds unless nuffing is the byrds you sendd which was not the byrds I meant. Even if The One wif the Tooths who is also called The CollekTorah brings them in The Jar. Those is not the byrds I meant. Or if I was fastly awake under the grandfodder tree when One Turrible Water falld from the wooly Skyys. Those is not the byrds I meant. And neever is the parsnips, although One of the parsnip has a littlest feather on the tops of its heads. That parsnip is maded out of Magiks I obey. I thinks I loveth that parsnip, but nones of it is those byrds I meant. At last I invented some idears if That Mutter and That Fodder is wonderling how: CollekT the byrds auf the roof and outs of the attic and swore to thems out lord that thy Oldest Animal shall be thy Witness Forevermores and At Last. And if it is scayred said Onto That Byrd “The Oldest Animal is scayred too.” And if it shaketh in thy Flaysh said Onto That Byrd “The Oldest Animal shaketh in thy Flaysh too.” And if it is a lostling if that soarless parsnip will never loveth back said Onto That Byrd “The Oldest Animal is a lostling too.”

I maded myselfs a prayer against forgetting me. I rasp it out lord wif one hoofs in the ayr, and one hoofs on my hearts. It says its wyrds like this: Something Beautiful is Going to Happen, Something Beautiful is Going to Happen, Something Beautiful is Going to Happen.

Sincerply,

The Oldest Animal (sighted in contents)

## **B is for Beatrice**

B was for Beatrice until the bigwigs showed up. Came straight from the beauty shop in their bouffants, in their barrettes. “Like a burglary,” the humans would later say. “Like coiffed heads of broccoli,” joked Walter B. “Believe you me,” said Beatrice, “this is serious.” “Shouldn’t have let them in,” said Walter B. Said Walter. “Too late to set up the booby trap,” said Beatrice. “And besides, they bustled up the balcony so beautifully I thought at first they were the birds.” “Eat rice,” barked the bigwigs. Beatrice buckled. They baffled her breeze. “Shut up you behemoths,” shouted Walter B. Shouted Walter. He’d have put up his dukes, but there were so many of them. Seven on the balustrade, and four in the bathtub. Walter checked the barometer. It didn’t look good. The bases were loaded, and the bigwigs were winning. Twelve were in the kitchen doing a bang-up job of browning Beatrice’s butter. One buried every balloon in the house. More showed up with barrels and barrels of rice. “Bon Voyage, Beatrice. Bye. Bye,” they bellowed.

But someone testified somewhere. But someone somewhere turned a knob on the bigwigs’ bamboozle. “B is for Beatrice,” someone somewhere testified. A stranger who barely knew of Beatrice, or of the bigwigs, or even Walter B. A stranger who wore a brooch, and dreamed at night of lambs. Someone testified somewhere and his testimony was strong and the humans listened. For thirty days and thirty nights the humans slouched east, like a thick old finger, as if through their listening they too were pointing something out. Something the bigwigs might never see. Something beautiful and real. Something like Walter B. wiping Beatrice’s tears away with a thick slice of bread.

## **The Healer**

*In the course of his human field work, The Healer has worked extensively with stones, food, angels, electricity, steel, and books. The result of his work was shown last winter at The Solution Museum, to the delight of some and the silence of most. When a human disappears, The Healer calls this technique “a dip in faith.” When meaning disappears, he calls this loss “a tree in a zoo.” He agreed to speak to me by telephone from The City of Tomorrow.*

What is the process of a human disappearing? How is it different from the way humans used to disappear?

In terms of “how do humans disappear now,” typically what happens is that these humans are either killed and leave no babies or, more frequently they build for themselves a “dwelling” behind a “barn” or a “shed.” Usually there is some coercion involved, either through the soft, gentle words of a figure in uniform, or through “snacks,” or through the promise of “snacks.” The possibility of ever shaking these words or these “snacks” loose from the mouth becomes for the human the possibility of what I call a “nostalgic ecstasy,” or “the ideal site.” In terms of how this is different from “the way humans used to disappear,” typically what happened then is that these humans built for themselves a “dwelling” as well, (behind a “barn” or a “shed”), but surrounded this “dwelling” with wire, hair, grass, and sometimes ducks. Also, and this happened with alarming frequency, a human would often smell his or her disappearance before he or she would see it.

In nature, a human will sometimes “crave” or “pray for” another human’s disappearance. How do you explain this phenomenon?

Often this will happen when a human is arranged in such a way so that he or she appears “drunk” or “high.” If this craving or prayer is written on paper or broadcast on a radio or on a television, common words are used. Whether this craving or prayer will be discarded or carefully dried and eventually displayed in a museum or a travel station depends on number, density, and beauty. If the human quietly turns this craving or prayer inside his or her heart for one to five years, this becomes



for the human a “secret dwelling.” If the human turns this craving or prayer inside his or her heart for more than five years, this becomes for the human “eternal return.”

So what truly disappears when a human disappears?

If a human has three names, two names will disappear. If a human has two names, frequently one name will disappear. If a human has one name, the entire name will always disappear. For example, “Beatrice.”

## The Box

For one whole year Walter B. could not stop, as Beatrice put it, “pulling the fish over the eyes,” and so she decided to discuss it with the others. Three days later, after a series of invitations, Walter B.’s Extraordinary Cousin, The Healer, and The Collector were sprawled on the rug. Beatrice paced the room. “I have asked you here,” she began, “because for one whole year Walter B. has not stopped pulling the fish over the eyes.” “Don’t you mean,” asked The Healer, raising his hand, “the wool?” Beatrice squinted and carried on. “It began innocently enough: first the war cries, then the wires he looped through my sleeves – these were fabrications I could live with. Even when,” she said looking at The Collector, “he swore the stones he brought home were children he rescued from an abandoned airfield, I trusted him. I fed them even. I rocked the stones to sleep.” Beatrice stopped. “Can someone please wake Walter B.’s Extraordinary Cousin up.” The Healer shook him roughly, but Walter B.’s Extraordinary Cousin was, as always, too far gone. “Never mind,” said Beatrice, gathering back her thoughts. “Even the mice Walter B. arranged in the vase and called flowers. Even this I accepted. I plucked their ears. Once I even blew on their fur and made a wish.” Tears began to stream down The Collector’s face. “But when he began calling me Abigail,” said Beatrice wringing her hands, “I could not answer. And so I have asked you here because Walter B. has glossed my last dish. He has thrown off every scent in the house.” The Healer sniffed at the air. Whether it smelled of trains or of clocks or of hats he could not decide. “Incredible,” thought The Healer. “And so I have asked you here,” said Beatrice now shaking, “because you must teach me...” She scratched at her birthmarks, and then she whispered the words she had feared all along: “You must teach me how to answer to Abigail.” The Collector gasped. Walter B.’s Extraordinary Cousin shouted “Beatrice” in his sleep. The Healer leapt up: “I have for you, my Beatrice, my Beatrice, a solution!” He reached into his pocket and pulled out the plans for the machine he had spent his entire life building. “I call it,” he said beaming, “The Reality Testing Booth.” Beatrice stared at the beautiful dark lines on the page. Her heart fell. “All this is,” she said desperately, “is a box.” The Healer stared at Beatrice for a long time. Was she no different from Abigail, he wondered. He folded up his plans, shook his head, and disappeared sadly out the door. The Collector followed. He carried Walter B.’s Extraordinary Cousin in his arms. “Am I no different from Abigail,” wondered Beatrice. And as Beatrice wondered somewhere nearby Abigail rose from her bed, stretched her young body, and wondered too.

VII

*back in business – new in the neighborhood – death –  
robes in the trees – a carousel – swimsuits – brushes and the green –  
an old flashlight – her voice was not unkind – an odd look*

## **The Rooster**

It was time to begin again. It was, according to the humans huddled in the hills, time for a new occasion. “What,” asked Walter B. jumping up and down, “comes next?” Beatrice studied the list: “exile...check, return...check, disillusionment...” “Check,” interrupted Walter B., too excited now to flap his arms. “I am too excited,” said Walter B., “to flap my arms. It is like I have a rooster inside me. I cannot wait for you to break the news.” Beatrice studied the list. She thought about the scraps in the yard that still needed grazing. Walter B. pulled his mittens off impatiently. “Please,” said Walter B., “please tell me what comes next. Are we back in business?” In another world, thought Beatrice, who knows what would have become of him... “Please,” urged Walter B., running up and down the stairs. “Please tell me what comes next.” Beatrice sighed. “It is repair, Walter B., repair comes next.” “This proves nothing,” whispered Walter B. stopping at the bottom. And then a little softer, he asked, “what is repair?” “I do not know,” said Beatrice. “I do not know what is repair.” “Maybe if I closed my eyes,” said Walter B. “Maybe there is a hospital nearby with brightly lit windows. Maybe we could ask.” But no, repair came next and this was bad. Even Beatrice, as she folded up the list, knew this was bad. The rooster inside Walter B. knew it too. There was no hospital nearby. There was no one to ask. And so the rooster left Walter B. in disbelief and followed the river into the chilly night.

## The Creation

The first time Walter B. died Beatrice announced she would stand in the street until this never happens again. “Until what never happens again?” asked Walter B, embracing her. “Until this,” she said. “Until what?” asked Walter B. “This! said Beatrice, shaking herself loose from his arms. “What are you,” asked Beatrice, “new in the neighborhood?” “Yes,” said Walter B., “I am new in the neighborhood. That is,” he continued, “if it is this neighborhood you are referring to.” They looked around. It was, in fact, a new neighborhood.

The second time Walter B. died it was, according to Beatrice, indecorous.

A few moments before Walter B. died for the third time he mourned the fact he would only use the word *crepuscular* once in his life, and incorrectly. “I would have felt this life more complete, sweet Beatrice, had that word referred to a wonderful party rather than to twilight. As in, ‘tonight, my love, I am going to the crepuscular without you!’”

The fourth time Walter B. died the man who arrived to break for Beatrice the news of Walter B.’s fourth death resembled Walter B. although his appearance was less ambitious than Walter B.’s appearance would have been had Walter B. arrived to break for Beatrice the news of Walter B.’s fourth death.

The fifth time Walter B. died he seemed distracted. “You seem,” said Beatrice, “distracted.” “What?” said Walter B. “Distracted,” said Beatrice. “Oh,” said Walter B. “What do you call this,” he asked, holding up one of the children. “A child,” said Beatrice. “Oh,” said Walter B. “A child.”

The sixth time Walter B. died, Beatrice investigated the crime. “Who,” asked Beatrice, “has done this to you?” Walter B. shrugged. “For god’s sake,” cried Beatrice, “tell me. Was it the children again? Was it me? Who has ruined you, my darling?” “If you must know,” said Walter B., “it was The Collector with his sack of paper animals.” “A suffocation!” gasped Beatrice. “No, my little bird,” he said swinging her around by the waist, “it was the most colorful trample I could have ever hoped for. Wish you were there,” he sang. “Wish you could’ve come with.”

For three days after Walter B. died for the seventh time, Beatrice moved from room to room calling for him. For three days. And then she stopped. She knew he would die again. "He simply has to," she said to herself, hanging his robes in the trees where he would be sure to find them.

## **Long Ago and Far Away**

“Doing some housekeeping?” asked Walter B. “What was that?” asked Beatrice. “Housekeeping. Are you doing some housekeeping?” “If by housekeeping you mean time travel, then yes, I am doing some housekeeping.” “Can I do some too?” asked Walter B. Beatrice thought for a moment. Lately, it seemed, Walter B. had not a feather to fetch. Not a fish to mangle. Ever since the carousel ride he seemed lost. He should not have gone twice in all that dampness and fog. Beatrice had begun to notice a deep whir coming from Walter B.’s chest. As if somewhere unimaginably long ago and far away Walter B. was still going around and around. “Are you up to speed?” asked Beatrice, hoping for the best. “If by up to speed you mean standing next to you, then yes, I am up to speed.” Walter B. was in fact standing next to Beatrice. “Hello there,” said Beatrice. “Hello,” said Walter B. “Fine,” said Beatrice, “let’s help each other into our swimsuits and proceed.” “To the ramparts!” shouted Walter B. “Yes, dear,” said Beatrice, snapping him in, “to the ramparts.” And off they went to look for the Walter B. Walter B. once was before the terrible mistake of the carousel ride.

## **The Oldest Animal Writes a Letter Home**

To That Mutter and That Fodder:

Once I looks up and That Mutter and That Fodder is floating bye in the green baskyt helded ups by the Strings of the Allmightiest Heavens, and what I would not giveth to be alpsio in that baskyt isn't even my bones because I would. Seventh bones to be exactly. Once I looks up and That Mutter and That Fodder is floating bye in the green baskyt, and they is laffing, and they is laffing, and I is wif my hoofs maketh so much rakeus and so much boohaha, and I is like "*I is Done Be Low!!!*". Why does that baskyt float away? Where is the byrds? Once I looks up and That Mutter and That Fodder is floating bye in the green baskyt, and That Fodder is feedling That Mutter the most beautiful pancake the whirld has ever seeped. Why does That Mutter and That Fodder not look done where I exists and giveth me a bite? Once I looks up and That Mutter and That Fodder is floating bye in the green baskyt helded ups by the Strings of the Allmightiest Heavens, and what I would not giveth to be alpsio in that baskyt isn't even my hopes to be in that baskyt. Here. Taketh my hopes. Except for the byrds, and the pancake. Taketh my hopes so that I (The Oldest Animal) can float in the green baskyt wif That Mutter and That Fodder and seeps the whirld like That Mutter who is alpsio called Be Trice, and That Fodder who is alpsio called Double You Be seeps the whirld. Ups Ups and All Ways. I maded you a droaring auf me in the baskyt. The One wif the Tooths gave me the brushes and the green.

Sincerply,

The Oldest Animal (sighted in contents)



## **A History of Stray**

Walter B. lit his pipe. It tasted like goat. “This pipe,” said Walter B., “tastes like goat.” “Should I usurp it?” asked Beatrice. “No,” said Walter B. “In fact, it’s left me rather razzed up. Should we stray?” “What is this thing,” asked Beatrice, “to stray?” “To stray,” explained Walter B., “is to find ourselves apart from our purpose.” Beatrice considered their purpose. She went to the oven where they kept it. She opened the door. She shone on it an old flashlight. It looked at her, as it often did, in exactly the wrong place. Whether it was its sad color, or whether it was its parched fur: there was something indifferent about it, almost lifeless. Beatrice shut the door. “What’s happening in there?” asked Walter B. “I do not wish,” said Beatrice, “ever to trudge after our purpose again. Let’s stray.” And so Walter B. and Beatrice strayed. For years they strayed without their purpose. They strayed under the hatch. And they strayed between the rails. They strayed into a wide, rutted road that ended in a condensed history of the life they’d never live. They strayed until there was nothing official between them. On Beatrice’s face there became an odd look. “I feel like a derelict,” said Beatrice wearily. Her voice was not unkind. “I want to skedaddle,” she said, “away from our stray. I miss our purpose.” Walter B.’s heart burned with regret. He no longer felt razzed. And so they trudged back. For years they trudged. But they could not remember whether it was its sad color, or whether it was its parched fur. They could not remember. They turned the discarded pieces over. They combed each others’ notebooks for clues. But nothing resembled the purpose from which they strayed. Not the claw, not the song, not even the soft deep yawn they would soon encounter somewhere along their way.

VIII

*nests – the bible – am I am Jew – maybe the forest –  
all winter he carried her – a long, long time –  
meats – milk – ruin – excitement*

## **The Stethoscope**

This might seem difficult to believe but it was almost daybreak. Beatrice had spent the last two days holding her stethoscope to the water. Then to Walter B., then to the lampshade. She held her stethoscope to the milk, the livingroom, the babies. She held her stethoscope to Walter B.'s stethoscope. And she held it to The Collector. And she held it to the yarn. She held her stethoscope to some of the humans who had gathered, beside her, to watch. And she held it to the animals who knew not to watch. There was nothing Beatrice dreaded more than something not beating like it should. "Something here," she explained to Walter B., waving her arms around her head, then around his, then around the world as she understood it, "is very, very wrong." She wanted Walter B. to take from her the stethoscope away. She wanted him to confess what he saw, at the end, in that cart. But Walter B., who could not permit himself to listen to the world like Beatrice could, needed Beatrice to continue her listening. He was never as fond of Beatrice as he was when he watched her listen. She was sad when she listened, and strangely scientific. "Sometimes," he said to Beatrice, guiding her stethoscope to her heart, "there's a Beatrice in there. And sometimes, B., she wants everyone to know." But something was not beating as it should. And there was nothing Beatrice dreaded more than something not beating as it should. Except for nests. She truly dreaded nests.

## The Oldest Animal Writes a Letter Home

To That Mutter and That Fodder:

What ayls me? Maybe a revolupshun is in my hearts and my hearts is loosing? Send bayonets. Let the bayonets be the kyndness that shall foughts to keeps me here. How good are bayonets at foughting? The CollekTorah sayeth "Very, very good." I am scayred. If my hearts loose is that my End or is that my Enter Mission? Alpsy I am wonderling how many moufrasps is between an ayl and an end? Eleventh? That is so lyttle. Alpsy I am wonderling how my hearts could loose if my hearts beliefs in so muchly? For instance, byrds. For instance, That Mutter. For instance, byrds again. Why is it feeling inside my firs like I (The Oldest Animal) is abouts to leave this Foryst for the Uver Foryst? Send one plain ambeless. Maybe wif a sirens to scayr the loose away. I am not ready. Remember that nights when That Mutter wored around my necks a scarf and letted me outs because auf that rule? Who belongs to that rule? The marmalades? The marmalades sayeth "No, it is the herrings." And the herrings sayeth "No, it is the marmalades." Whoever is beholdens to that rule shall driveth that ambeless with bayonets in its hoofs. Those isn't even my wyrds. Those is the wyrds of the bibble. That is how I know I isn't alone. The bibble was thinksing auf me when it got wrotted. The bibble alpsy thinkses auf who is begat and who is slew. That is how all the begats and the slews is alpsy not alone. That maketh me a lyttle hapsy. I herd in the Uver Foryst there is a Mutter who would never wore around my necks a scarf and letted me outs because auf that rule. I herd That Mutter is alpsy called Abegill. I herd her hayr is yellow. I isn't ready for her yellow hayr.

Sincerply,

The Oldest Animal (sighted in contents)

## **The Word**

“Am I a Jew?” asked Beatrice. Walter B. looked worried. Hoping to distract her, he gave Beatrice a standing ovation. She giggled. She oiled, rouged, and curtsied, but she was not deterred. The humans rode past on their yellow bicycles. “Am I a Jew?” she shouted. The humans frowned and looked away. They rode on. Walter B. decided he would not, as he had planned, jump out of the cake after all. One surprise would be enough. “Where did you hear,” asked Walter B., “that word?” Beatrice rummaged through her vaccination papers, but nothing was written down there but verdicts. She could not remember. Maybe the forest? The auditorium? “Studies have shown,” explained Walter B., “that wherever it was you probably misheard.” Triumphant, he took a sip from his thermos. But Beatrice was not having it. Wherever she was Beatrice could hear, however faint, that word. Like Walter B., it seemed to have arrived from a distance as if to watch her every evening climb the soft staircase and disappear into the grainy dark. “Jew, Jew, Jew, Jew...” Even Walter B. could not deny it was a song. If she could multiply the sum of her parts, thought Beatrice, and sell each part for feed, maybe someone would tell her the answer one day for a very high price.

## The Name

When Walter B. discovered Beatrice that winter inside his chest, he began to suspect that something for Beatrice had never happened. Something, perhaps, like a name, he thought to himself, as he carried her. He carried her into the parlor. And he carried her into his bed. All winter he carried her, inside his chest, like a Beatrice without a name. When the spectacle came to town he carried her to the spectacle. And when the spectacle left town, he knew he would go on carrying her without the spectacle for a long time. All winter, he carried her. There were times he did not want to go on with this carrying. There were times he wanted to tie around her neck a thin bundle of sticks and send her out. But something for Beatrice had never happened. Something like a name. And this was a world, thought Walter B., a world inside which a Beatrice could not live without a name. He studied his chest and marveled at its smallness. He could not, like this, go on. If he could find for Beatrice a name, thought Walter B., he could empty her out. If he could find for Beatrice a name, a name that would last, he could go on without her. A name like Poland. Or Abigail, for example. But first he would have to remove Beatrice from Beatrice. But how? How does a Walter B., wondered Walter B., remove a Beatrice from a Beatrice so that he can find for her a name. A name that could empty his chest of a Beatrice. He hadn't meant to go on carrying her for this long. But he went on carrying her. He carried her inside his chest for a long, long time. He carried her until one day she was gone. And the space in his chest where he had once carried her grew large. He marveled at its largeness. And he knew he would go on carrying this largeness, this largeness that was once inside him a Beatrice, for a long, long time.

## **Parashas Acharei Mos**

So as not to commit the crime which crime instrument did you use?

Were there meats promised?

Describe for me the "triumph of Poland."

Describe for me the "triumph of spectacle."

Is it true that he touched, in your absence, the embroidery with his mouth?

Or with his hands?

Vaccination excites me.

And what of milk?

And what of day?

And what of Beatrice?

How did you think this would end?

How did you think this would end?

Nests excite me.

I've always been lucky.

Can you elaborate on that?

Do humans matter as much as what they ruin?

Prayer excites me, asymmetrically.

## IX

*figs – a party hat – the toast – a letter from the Uver Foryst –  
everything is not impossible – 100% of theses names are yours –  
wished we were as touched – a humanless day*



## **The Saddest Gown in the World**

“I do not give anymore,” said Walter B., “a fig about you.” “Are you sure?” asked Beatrice. “Absolutely,” said Walter B. “Not a fig?” asked Beatrice. “Not a fig,” said Walter B. “Promise?” asked Beatrice. “Promise,” said Walter B. “When do you suppose,” asked Beatrice, “you will give about me a fig again?” Walter B. looked up at the sky. “Probably not for many years,” said Walter B. “Oh,” said Beatrice. “Should I wait?” “Of course,” said Walter B., “you should wait.” “I’d be very happy,” said Beatrice, “if you joined me while I waited.” Walter B. squeezed her hand. “One day,” said Walter B., “I will make for you a sewing of all the figs I never gave about you.” And one day Walter B. would. He would sew all the figs together. It would not be easy, but he would do it. If he could promise Beatrice anything he could promise her this. He would make for Beatrice a perfect sewing of all the figs he never gave about her. She could wear it, thought Walter B., like a gown. And everyone would applaud.

## **The Party**

The worst thing, remembered Beatrice, was that the party was not in her honor. The humans danced with lanterns in their hands. The Collector leaned against the wall and sipped milk through a pink straw. The cake already was damaged. Even The Unlikelies were there. Even the nurses. Walter B. mingled. A tuft of warm fur sailed through the air and landed at Beatrice's feet. "Toast, toast, toast, toast!" demanded the guests. The party was on. Beatrice pushed through the matted crowd. She untied the green balloon from around her wrist and handed it to Walter B. "Here, hold this," she said, "while I say some words about you." Walter B. took the balloon. Had Beatrice known why for Walter B. this party was being thrown what follows might have stayed forgotten. But Beatrice did not know why, and so she cleared her throat, and carried on. "I would like to begin this toast by remembering why tonight we've gathered here." The guests lowered their heads. The Collector took another sip of milk and winked at Walter B. The Unlikelies sneaked into the stairwell to loudly exchange party favors. Beatrice held the warm fur against her mouth. She had no toast, but she did have a hunch. Something was wrong again. Dear, old, outfoxed Walter B. beamed beneath his party hat. If only Beatrice had the courage to yell "surprise!" maybe then The Oldest Animal would (if not for Beatrice) then at least for Walter B., jump out of the cake. But the cake already was damaged. The documents already were signed. The organization already was joined. And the night had only just begun.

## **The Oldest Animal Writes a Letter Home**

To That Mutter and That Fodder:

There is sheeps here. I would never have guesselled. There is also grapefruit skins and whistles for dressling up. Sometimes there are boats coming with more of us. In the beginning I hidded. In the beginning I lookyd around for her yellow hayr because I knewed. My hearts loosed, and I knewed. The bayonets stopped foughting, and I knewed, and now forever''s the amount of byrds it tooketh me to get here. I play a game wif the sheeps. It is a counting game that adds ups all the diffrynces and all the sames between the Foryst and the Uver Foryst.

Diffrynces: In the Uver Foryst all of us is sometimes a tree, or PoLand, or nuffing, or one green baskyt, or so many uver things. Even if I want to be the One wif the Tooths for one whole day I am allOwed. Even if I want to be the sheeps. Sames: Where is That Mutter and That Fodder? Sames: I was never ready for neever. Diffrynces: In the Uver Foryst I looks out and seeps That Mutter''s witfur coat perched on the bow of the boat when it sails hencefroth with more of us. Maybe it is not impossibled the arms wave gloryisplea in the wynds for me? I ask the sheeps. The sheeps say everything is not impossibled. I knewed those arms is not That Mutter's arms. I clopse my eyes and pretend.

Sincerply,

The Oldest Animal (sighted in contents)

## The Ruse

Beatrice was deciding whether or not to include her name on the sign-up sheet when it occurred to Walter B. there'd been a ruse. "There's been," said Walter B., suddenly out of breath, "a ruse." "Look!" said Beatrice, signing her name very carefully, "isn't my slot first-rate?" "Didn't you hear me?" asked Walter B. "There's been," he coughed, "there's been a ruse." Walter B. and Beatrice searched the sheet for familiar names, but no familiar names were found. Except, of course, for Beatrice's. Beatrice lifted the pen and signed again. "Sometimes when I'm excited," said Beatrice, "I sign again." Walter B. pulled at his trousers. "Are you listening?" he asked hopelessly. "There's been..." He rocked back and forth. "There's been," he muttered, "a ruse." Beatrice stared blankly at Walter B., then signed her name again. Walter B. examined the sign-up sheet. "100% of these names," sighed Walter B., "are yours." "What do you suppose," asked Beatrice signing her name again, "should be done?" Walter B. knew there was no modest way to handle this. There had been a ruse. And now the sign-up sheet was full. He could sign at the bottom, he considered, as an alternate. Or he could leave this place and never return. "What strikes me most," said Walter B. slowly backing away from the sign-up sheet, "are the perfect gradations of light around the margins." "Amazing," agreed Beatrice. "And from over here," called out Walter B...But Beatrice could not hear him. He was too far away. There had been a ruse, and now there were piles and piles of meat for Beatrice to chew before the sun came up. There wasn't much time. And no one, not even Walter B., was there to help her.

## The Incident

I had had in my life nothing to do with Beatrice and Walter B., did not even know in what part of the city they lived. Did not even know from which egg stand they purchased their eggs. I barely heard of them. I knew nothing of the picture books they left in their yard, perhaps for some foreign visitor. I knew nothing of their living room. Or of the pale, glassy animals drifting among them.

You must understand I had had in my life nothing to do with Beatrice and Walter B. We had an unspoken agreement. The day The Healer arrived to question me about the incident, I was bent over my desk dissecting the word *kill* with an instrument once used to pry open a mouth. “Does it work?” asked The Healer. “This dissection business?” I had only gotten as far as the letter I. “It isn’t my fault,” I explained. The Healer looked around my spare room. “Here,” he asked, “there are no humans?” “Who do you think,” I said trying to remain calm, “I am looking for?” I held the *K* and the *I* up to The Healer for a closer look. “Oooh,” exclaimed The Healer stepping back, “*drafty*.” By then it was difficult for the Healer and me not to wish we were as touched as the pale, glassy animals drifting among them. But we were not touched. We were not touched at all. “What do you suppose,” asked The Healer running his large palms over the word, “it is like?” I thought: He is better than me. His questions are better than my questions. I had had in my life nothing to do with Beatrice and Walter B. I did not even know in what part of the city they lived. “Is it like a human?” asked The Healer, holding each letter up to the light. “Sort of,” I replied, wrapping the word back into its paper, “but with more of an ending.”

## **The Description**

Beatrice knew that to make for Walter B. a proper description of Walter B. she would need a basin. And she would need rope. She would need to forget Walter B.'s arms (at least for a minute), roughly. And she would need a spinning wheel. And if she could not find a spinning wheel a hoop would suffice. She stood very still in her yard and began to think about the word "human." It reminded her of the word "vaccination," which reminded her, again, of the word "human." Beatrice knew that to make for Walter B. a proper description of Walter B. she would need first to understand what the word "human" meant. It was a difficult word. She went inside, read the evening paper, and drank the glass of water Walter B. had, years ago, left for her. "Human" could not be a word, she decided, that she could use to describe the nobler and gentler aspects of Walter B. It was not that kind of word. She looked out her window and watched the humans live among each other. If she could define for herself precisely what they meant when they dug, and coughed, and touched like that, she could use, perhaps, the word. But she could not. If they were humans, Walter B. was not a human. If they were humans, Walter B. was more like a disguise. He was more like a bite, or a field, or a gather, than he was like a human. He was more like a day, Beatrice decided. He was more like a humanless day.