

12/11 Shibboleth, the fine point in pronunciation around which many lie slain. The unforgiving sieve of language. Something to think about the next time you're in the lovely Nederlandish seaside town of Scheveningen.

“For every image of the past that is not recognized in the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably. (The good tidings which the historian of the past brings with throbbing heart may be lost in a void the very moment he opens his mouth.)...

“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....”

Says Benjamin.

Did you write a book about the Center both unconsciously and precisely to constitute yourself on the margins?

What is not heard may sometimes be r(h)ead. And vice versa.

Ben Bernanke and the FedRez Boyz whack down interest rates – again – but insufficiently, so the market responds by lying down in the street, holding its breath and drumming its sneakers on the asphalt. It doesn't turn blue exactly, more like a bright red. When it does splutter something, it's pure hysteria: it wants to be rewarded – again – for being bad. *NO! I don't care that I broke daddy's pipe – I want a beebee gun!*
Now!

OK, OK, just get up and let me blow your nose.

No not a beebie gun, an AK-47!

Alright, alright already.

No, a nuclear bomb! Two nuclear bombs. And I won't get up until you PROMISE TO BUY THEM FOR ME RIGHT NOW!

If, while reading the *Times* story: "Feds Cut Rates a Quarter Point; Stocks Dive," you accidentally click on the little blue box to the right of the text, an ad explodes in your face. Thus you become aware of something you'd have otherwise remained entirely ignorant of: The Frolicking Penguin Collection by StubenGlas.

"Our endearing quintet of crystal penguins comes with its own set of two white marble bases shaped like floating platforms of thick sea ice. Have fun creating endless arrangements of Antarctic antics as the penguins play and bask in the polar sunlight. This collection makes a delightful gift that will be enjoyed for years to come."

Ah, the heart leaps, but then comes the caveat: "Due to overwhelming demand for this design, Frolicking Penguin Collection is currently backordered. The estimated ship date for orders placed today is December 14, 2007."

Whew!

Citigroup's circled the wagons and the Indian rides to the rescue. Namely one Vikram S. Pandit, a native of Nagpur – an economic, political and religious center known, among other things, for the wonder and beauty of its orange groves and a movement to overcome discrimination against Untouchables.

Having journeyed through Morgan Stanley, Pandit joined the sorry Citi caravan six months ago to take charge of its "alternative investments" unit. Fast-

tracked into the firm's investment banking, er, wing, he now, as Uber Jefe, "confronts a more daunting task: shoring up the entire company, which has been brought to its knees by the mortgage crisis....

"Fixing Citigroup will not be easy. Mr. Pandit has never run a public company, let alone one as big and complex as Citigroup. The company could face billions of dollars in additional losses on troubled home loans. Its stock price has fallen 40 percent this year, and its balance sheet is overstretched.

"Mr. Pandit must determine whether the business should be broken up, as investors have prodded for years, or take one last stab at making the company easier to manage. He also must navigate the current market turbulence, all the while charting its overseas expansion.

"While Mr. Pandit has an impressive résumé, he is known more as an analytical technocrat than a charismatic leader. He has never managed a consumer banking business, an area now besieged by the deepening mortgage-related crisis and a struggling credit card division...."

Brought to knees... overstretched... broken up... prodded... one last stab... turbulence... besieged... crisis... struggling.... What a language of suffering the Messenger delivers! While alongside the Potomac, the foaming white cascade of blather over "harsh interrogations" surges on. And in the black sites, where debts of another kind are incurred, it is not corporations, rather individual mortal frames which are *brought to knees, overstretched, prodded...*

Horrible twin bomb blasts in Algiers. Many killed, scores injured, mostly students on their way to university. Down comes a UN development building and the

government Constitutional Council. Eleventh day of the month, like a kind of diabolical clockwork.

The French, who can speak uniquely to these matters because they are so well, *impliqué*, do not find themselves at a loss for words. Says Jean-Louis Bruguière – who until recently served as France’s former chief antiterrorism judge: “Al Qaeda has succeeded in creating an advanced unit in a strategic region: North Africa is the door to Europe.”

In “The Marriage of Heaven and Hell,” William Blake proposed that *If the doors of perception were cleansed, every thing would appear to man as it is: infinite.*

You’ve read the poem, but not the book from which Huxley borrowed the title *The Doors of Perception*. One you somehow missed. Even though your druggie days are done, reading Huxley always scours your doors some. Who knows whether one or all or some or none of them – Morrison, Manzarek, Krieger and Densmore – read verse or volume. Still the story is told that collectively, Adamically, they became, upon receiving these texts, The Doors.

A consequence of which is that, two score years after, when someone blows up a great many people and human-created things, so close to the Kasbah, and another man remarks: “door to Europe,” all involuntarily, your head fills with song:

Yeah, made the scene

Week to week

Day to day

Hour to hour

The gate is straight

Deep and wide

Break on through to the other side...

Whole world 'round Dr. Freud's case opens toward an incommensurable, intolerable past, hence intolerant now. Whole world' round the axe through the door, the "Hi, honey, I'm home" of the repressed.

Silence. Jay Cantor imagines himself into the head of Ché Guevara. For hours he has been arguing with Castro, whose rhetoric exhausted, now turns not merely speechless but "mineral." In the end, perhaps even days later, El Ché will come to recognize his ideological error and once again, El Commandante will prevail. For the simple reason that *silence is argument carried on by other means.*

Book of Wonderment, endlessly open.

Beneath the headline "Israeli Forces Move Into Gaza," a pic of an IDF Merkava tank crippled by a missile. To the right, a big red ad for a StubenGlas lobster. Item 9097. \$3,800. Yes, but how kosher is crystal?

You've been at the margins of the center and the margins of the margins. Maybe that's why you like Comet Holmes so much. When you were younger, even yesterday, you always wished you had a more "trojan" orbit, one that didn't fling you out so far, or bring you in so close to breaking up. Planet envy. But then, what is a radical but an icy snowball surrounded by dust. Your tail is admired from afar, but get

too close and whoa, folks freak out. And the fact that, in part at least, you made yourself that way by stepping *out* rather than *in* at some crucial moment. Dance of the Kosmos has its dissenters.

You used to think that the outer reaches were nowhere, that a place closer in was better. But everyplace you are is somewhere. If for no other reason than by virtue of the fact that you're there.

12/12 Still down with a bug. Despite, you launch toward the café, pedaling, drinking in the tepid, insalubrious air. 8:40 and all around you the city flaps, struggling for altitude. It may be one of those days when it never makes it off the ground.

The *Times* headline and first graph read: "Fed Joins Central Banks in Loan Plan: The Federal Reserve announced Wednesday it is coordinating with other central banks to deal with the global credit crunch. The move sent stocks soaring on Wall Street."

But Eric B.'s email says it better:

Well Eric, all the king's horses and all the king's men deployed in the ephemeral innards of the banking system to put Humpty back together again and discovering that it's not an egg after all but an inflatable and they just can't find enough pieces to recreate what they used to think they saw sitting there on the Wall. Those holograms of finance!

Transparency, it's just a shot away.

A ray. Mayday it was, 2003. George stood on the deck that was not yet

generally perceived to be burning. Behind him, draped across the bridge of the carrier USS Abraham Lincoln, the banner: MISSION ACCOMPLISHED. But amidst such stagecraft, the quality most important to the publicators lay in the ineffable product of sun and atmosphere. In the image biz they call it Magic Hour Light.

And, two nights past, magic light in the heavens above: From Albion to Cuba to Nova Scotia, skyscanners observed a new exploding comet, at least what looked to be.

“Like Comet Holmes!” said Alvary Garay of Casselberry, Florida.

Chris Schierer of Cazenovia, New York, wondered “how such a bright naked-eye comet could have been missed.”

Then they saw pair of objects streaking through the “coma.”

“Say wha’?!” Most folks thought they’d witnessed a satellite explosion. Good guess, but as it turned out, not so. The dramatic flareup of pseudo-Holmes turned out to be a cloud of fuel dumped from the upper stage of an Atlas rocket that had launched a no-longer secret satellite into orbit for the National Reconnaissance Office. Still, fifty gorgeous minutesworth of celestial mystery.

At Camp Taji, when the electricity is on five miles away in Baghdad, it’s too light-polluted to see comets or fuel clouds. Nonetheless:

Spc. Gerry DeNardi stood at the on-base Burger King... hoping for a quick taste of home.

Camp Taji encompasses miles of scrapped Iraqi tanks, a busy U.S.

airstrip and thousands of soldiers living in row upon row of identical trailers. Several fast-food stands, a PX and a dining facility the size of a football field compose Taji's social hub. The base had been struck by an occasional mortar round, and a rocket had hit the airfield two weeks before and killed an American helicopter pilot. But the quiet base brought on a sense of being far from roadside bombs, far from rocket-propelled grenades and far from the daily gunfire that rained down on the soldiers of Charlie 1-26 as they patrolled Adhamiya, a violent Sunni neighborhood in northeastern Baghdad.

Just two weeks earlier, the 20-year-old DeNardi had lost five good friends, killed together as they rode in a Bradley Fighting Vehicle that rolled over a powerful roadside bomb.

As DeNardi walked up the three wood steps to the outdoor stand to pick up his burger, the siren wailed.

Wah! Wah! Wah! "Incoming! Incoming! Incoming!"

The alarms went off all the time – often after the mortar round or rocket had struck nothing but sand, miles from anything important. Many soldiers and others at Taji had taken to ignoring the warnings. DeNardi glanced around at the picnic tables to make sure everyone was still eating. They were. The foreign nationals who worked the fast-food stands hadn't left; so he went back to get the burger he had paid for.

The mortar round hit before he could pick up his order.

"I turned around and all of Burger King and me went flying," DeNardi said.

He'd lived through daily explosions in 11 months with Charlie Company, 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry Regiment, at nearby Combat Outpost Apache, a no-frills fortress smack in the middle of Adhamiya's hostile streets. He had rushed through flames to try to save friends and carried others to the aide station only to watch them die.

"I'm not getting killed at Burger King," he thought, and he dived for a concrete bunker. People were screaming. DeNardi saw a worker from Cinnabon hobbling around, so he climbed out of the bunker, pulled shrapnel out of the man's leg and bandaged him. The Pizza Hut manager was crying and said two more foreign workers were injured behind her stand – near the Burger King.

"Lightning doesn't strike twice," DeNardi said, "so I went back. But there were body parts everywhere." The first man's leg had been blown off, his other leg was barely attached and he had a chest wound. "He was going to die," DeNardi said.

The other wounded man had shrapnel to his neck. DeNardi peeled off his own shirt and fashioned a bandage out of it as other soldiers started streaming in to help.

Then, "all clear" sounded over the loudspeakers as medics arrived and took over.

"I'm covered in blood, but I still have my hamburger receipt," DeNardi said. "I went back to Burger King the next day, but they wouldn't give me my burger."

The above, written by Kelly Kennedy, appeared in “‘Not us. We’re not going’: Soldiers in 2nd Platoon, Charlie 1-26 stage a ‘mutiny’ that pulls the unit apart.” This from *The Army Times*, December, 8th issue. Plenty more to the story, but the gist of it is this: Following a disastrous mission a week later and a one-day recovery period, DeNardi and his platoon are ordered out again. They just say no. As did investors, today who, by the closing bell, brought the Dow pretty much back to flat.

Full page ad in the *Post*. An aerial shot. Everything tinted blue black with glitters. Broken chains at her feet, the Statue of Liberty points her finger heavenward like a disco queen while in the background, out of a bizarrely transformed Lower Manhattan, a gigantic, crystal-faceted bottle rises, topped with an unmistakably WTC-esque spire. IN AN ABSOLUT WORLD...

Swedish the vodka may be, but the whole comes off as an ad for the Freedom Tower as conceived by Gazprom.

Such architecture makes a certain kind of sense given the *Times* story yesterday reacting to CitiPandit’s elevation. “Seeking Leaders, U.S. Companies Think Globally,” the prose owns that “the corner offices of corporate America are increasingly being filled from every corner of the world,” and goes on to cite the recent installations of Fortune 100 CEO’s from, among others, India, Morocco, Egypt, and of all exotic places, Ireland. Kingdom Come, however will be celebrated the day a direct descendant of Genghis Kahn takes over as head of Greater Exxon and an ancestor of Timur the Lame sits on the throne at Toyota-Mercedes-GM. By this time, however, Darius the Great will be running the One True Bank, with advice from a council of Boyars and one or more of the brighter Cardinals and Rothschilds.

Imagine the calligraphy of the court. The splendiferousness of the parchment miniatures wrought by eunuch scribeslaves wielding brushes of the finest fetal mousewhisker. Inchallah!

And to invoke that great future moment, a quotidian act of real estate porn: the erasure of the last of Manhattan's topless palaces, the Playpen at 44th and Eighth. Once known as the Ideal vaudeville theater, refitted for the swinging seventies, the Playpen's red neon marquee featured an outline of the Manhattan skyline. On the right side, the Empire State Building. To the left, separated by a valley of indeterminate cityscape, the tower twins.

Several jumps ahead of the Landmarks game, those clever Tishmans, eager build hotels on their Monopoly properties, sent in a big orange destructo machine and eviscerated the building from the rear. Badabing-badaboom. Pile o' brix.

Write it. Ride it.

Ike Turner dies at 76. Rolling on a river. Time to pay the ferryman.