

1/29 Eric B. is looking well today, good color, clear of eye. You palaver in your various ways about perceptions of the sand running down. Egg timer's got to be turned over soon.

Outside the café to find it's raining. He wheels his bike and you take the side next to his good ear. He's just heard that *Vanity Fair* isn't doing cookies this year – the special imprinted images of their covers he's produced annually since time out of mind. It's a big job, difficult, requiring great precision in the color overlays, but, you'd imagine, a heretofore dependable infusion of ready cash. Still, he says, he feels free – thankful he doesn't have to do that any more – it stopped being fun a long time ago.

When you part ways, he goes on a few paces, then calls back to you: "Thanks for the Friday feasts!" You must look quizzical because he explicates: "The Born Witness."

Heartwarming.

Credit Default Swap. Now what's that supposed to be? Nobody knows, and if they know they can't say. But what it's like is selling someone the echo of the oink of a pig that's up and gone. And who knows if the pig was ever there? True, maybe he wasn't. Maybe some other pig threw his voice. Maybe it was some tricky cat imitating a pig. Still, those echoes fading and some fool standing there thinking he bought himself a pig.

Sixty-odd trillion bucksworth, they say. Though how anyone can count up to such a fundamentally preposterous number beats imagining. Twelve zeroes on it, like the apostles.

SocGén, mon amour, SocGén.

The cranes have flocked elsewhere. Or as the gardener in a Dylan Thomas story once said: "The birds 'ave 'ad the seeds."

Everyone calls for s'mores. But s'mores there are n'more.

An image of the once ubiquitous signs comes flashing into your head. And the lag between them, enough to take each line in. And though you might not understand the sense of the whole or its parts, there is always, as in a Ghazal, the familiar repetition of the stanza's final words. It sets you off on a journey: *reconnaître* the roadside rhymes of the year of your *naissance*. Start anywhere and drive – your Ford, Chevy, Rambler, Packard, Desoto:

Candidate says

Campaign confusing

Babies kiss me

Since I've been using

Burma-Shave.

The odometer turns and a few miles on:

The whale

Put Jonah

Down the hatch

But coughed him up

Because he scratched

Burma-Shave.

Then down near where Highway 49 makes an X with Highway 61:

He tried to cross

As fast train neared

Death didn't draft him

He volunteered

Burma Shave.

Décalage. Décalage. And fifty-eight years of désouvement.

Look right

Look left

Look to the rear

Objects are closer

Than they appear

B-b-b-b-

Regard the cotter pin: a small but important part.

Bush's presumptively final State of the Union address. You watch his head bob in a little window on your iBook, a day late and a euro short. To the left of Bush and behind him in a high-backed leather chair, Cheney sits, looking maudlin and deflated.

Tweedle-dee Dee is a lowdown, sorry old man

Tweedle-dee Dum, he'll stab you where you stand...

Nancy Pelosi, Democratic house speaker, sits directly to Bush's right – the

angelically preferential spot – technically stage left, in the same kind of chair as Cheney’s. But she’s more erect, so her head comes up as high as Dick’s does. And in truth, you hardly recognize her: curvy, artful hairdo with highlights. A ready smile, dare you say it, sexy.

You can and do turn the sound off. Gød is in the cutaways, among them a lingering view of Hillary wherein she exudes a nearly Mona Lisa-like radiance, as if she’s been to the top of some internal mountaintop. And you get the strange sensation that she’s in some other place now and if her candidacy were to absolutely implode a week from now, she’d hardly feel it at all. On the other hand, perhaps the Sybils have whispered to her of a stunning victory to come.

Dubo

Dubon

Dubonnet.

Who is it that engineers these States of the Union, and especially those cutaways? Who decides, for example, that this is the exact moment to zero in on Obama, his expression unreadable, two fingers pressed to his mouth? Or when to insert shots of the comely Bush daughters, or, during a spiel about famine, malaria and AIDs, reveal a young woman, headdressed and robed in resplendent African patterns and dandling on her knee a bright-eyed infant who appears to be swathed in a leopard skin.

Many other faces unknown to you – a few familiar but unplaceable – some caught reacting to what Bush says, or a comment by their neighbor. Others hearkening to the presence of an internal moment.

What script, hidden or otherwise, governs these selections? To what degree do opportunism, autonomy, or improvisation enter the equation? And when it's all done, how many degrees deep is the meaning?

Toward the conclusion, you turn the audio back on. It's extraordinary. By Bush standards, or any standards of Western political rhetoric, his tone is gentle, almost wistful. He'd lull us. How very, very strange. Creepy too, in a different way. It'd be lovely to know what the game is, but you haven't a clue.

Money talks – but not loud enough. Donc, Jérôme Kerviel walks.

The notion of a garage band assumes the likelihood of a living space attached. So it's only a matter of time until someone starts an *a capella* quartet called the Four Closures. Don't need to own anything, just make yourself at home on an empty stoop.

1/30 Winds, winds, twisters here and there, and a solid deepfreeze from Washington state across to the Erie shores of Buffalo where the temperature plummets forty degrees in a matter of hours. In the early a.m., the lake surges ten feet, leaving behind great chunks of ice as it recedes. In Fort Greene, gusts bring down a scaffold on the roof of a half-built residential tower. One workman killed in a thirteen-story fall. Another survives a thirty foot drop to the roof, seriously injured.

You gotta love the internet. Google “fort greene scaffold collapse” and you get ten thousand urls that carry some version of the story. Click one. Up pops a capsule report on the accident surrounded by ads for Affordable Scaffolding, Scaffolding System Rental (“Construction Scaffolding and Special Events”), the Scaffolding SuperStore, Scaffold Hoists (“increase construction productivity”) and, of course, Scaffold Training Courses – in company with pitches for Fast Business Loans, Debt Consolidation Quotes, Ten Tips to Lose Belly Fat (www.FatLoss4Idiots.com) and \$20,000 Grants for Single Mothers (“Never Repay – Get Your Free Kit Now”).

Southwest to northeast, clouds rushing by like there’s no tomorrow. Walking west post-café across 23rd Street with Tomás, he teaches you a new Spanish formulation, *ha (d)escampado*: meaning an atmospheric clean sweep – a term he associates with García Márquez, who uses it to describe the sky’s sudden opening into blue after a torrential rainstorm – and which elegantly enfolds, at least by implication, the word “campo.”

Regresaron por la misma calle. Había escampado. El cielo se hizo profundo, de un azul intenso. “Ya no llueve más,” pensó el coronel, y se sintió mejor, pero continuó absorto...

They returned along the same street. Habia escampado, revealing the depths of an intensely blue sky. “The rain is over,” thought the colonel, and felt better, pero continuó absorto...

Susan T. emails that the last installment, number 11, had a quality of

“movement like waves after a hurricane.” A post-Katrina of the mind.

Est-ce que ce monde est sérieux?

No, no hombre, c'est ludique.

Seriously ludic.

Do clouds decamp?

The *Messenger* headlines: “Israeli Inquiry Finds ‘Grave Failings’ in ‘06 War.”

What’s that about? By any measure, the IDF succeeded providing more than a sufficiency of craters that, pressed into service, could serve as graves for the vast number of southern Lebanese they killed outright. This apart from indeterminate future grave candidates caused by as-yet unexploded clusterbombs and the long term effects of depleted uranium shells.

It’s not living from day to day you feel. It’s hurtling through space.



Yikes!

John Reed, kan ya makan, witnessed the November Revolution and had this to say about Parliamentary Procedure in *Ten Days That Shook the World*:

Russian meetings and conventions are organized after the Continental model rather than our own. The first action is usually the election of officers and the *presidium*.

The *presidium* is the presiding committee, composed of representatives of the groups and political factions represented in the assembly, in proportion to their numbers. The *presidium* arranges the Order of Business, and its members can be called upon by the president to take the chair *pro tem*.

Each question (*vopros*) is stated in a general way and then debated, and at the close of the debate resolutions are submitted by the different factions, and each one voted on separately. The Order of Business can be, and usually is, smashed to pieces in the first half hour. On the plea of "emergency," which the crowd almost always grants, anybody from the floor can get up and say anything on any subject. The crowd controls the meeting, practically the only function of the Speaker being to keep order by ringing a little bell, and to recognize speakers. Almost all the real work of the session is done in caucuses of the different groups and political factions, which almost always cast their votes in a body and are represented by floor-leaders. The result is, however, that at every important new point, or vote, the session takes recess to enable the different groups and political factions to hold a caucus.

The crowd is extremely noisy, cheering or heckling speakers,

overriding the plans of the *presidium*. Among the customary cries are:
“*Prosim!* Please! Go on” “*Pravilno!*” or “*Eto vierno!* That’s true! Right!”
“*Do volno!* Enough!” “*Doloi!* Down with him!” “*Posor!* Shame!” and
“*Teeshe!* Silence! Not so noisy!”

The internet goes down, or to a crawl, across large swaths of the Middle East and much of Asia. The official story, an unknown disruption of the undersea cable that carries much of the area’s bandwidth occurred somewhere between Sicily and Egypt.

Then too, South Africa’s mining industry takes itself offline for several days. Lack of electrical power. Persistent blackouts. Cape town by candle light. So, yo, technology, what’s the 411?

Forty years gone, the height of the Tet. Sustained assaults by the Vietcong and North Vietnamese regulars from Hue south to Saigon. South Vietnamese president Nguyen Van Thieu declares martial law.



The shot seen round the world. Kill chicken scare monkey.

We know Eddie (as opposed to Edie) Adams took the photo, and that Saigon police chief Nguyen Ngoc Loan ended badly not long after. But who was “a Vietcong prisoner”?

Not far as the crow flies from where these shots were shot, guerillas blow up the radio station. They attack the general staff and naval HQs, several police stations, the Philippine ambassador’s residence and the airport. A suicide squad sets off a bomb that breeches the wall of the U.S. embassy. And here we are, twoscore years along, watching as Mac, with evermore uncanny smile, and shadowed by his android wife, rolls, like rolling thunder, toward the Republican nomination.

On the brink of another lunar new year.

Here’s an idea: as a corrective to George Bush, put up a candidate who has *personally* dropped tons of bombs on people from a great height. After which, elected to high public office, the good soldier helped bury the S&L scandal. That’s just the fellow!

And Wellstone. Gone down in another plane, in another storm.

1/31 In the west, Venus and Jupiter, so close together you could cover them both with one outstretched thumb. And to the south, phosphorescent crescent, its shape fluttering on ten thousand flags, the waning moon.

Comfort creatures.

The sundogs bark, and the troubadours trouble on.

Nobody knows the troubles...

The troubles of dross and the troubles d'or.

Alchemy and plumbing – twin fonts of knowledge. Like serpents twining up a staff.

And, in China, as everywhere else albeit not on a scale of 1.3 billion people, no fuel = no power. So if two hundred million urban workers try to travel home for the new year, and forty percent of railway capacity is dedicated to moving coal... It doesn't take facility with the abacus to do the math.

Who will insure the insurers?

Questions, questions everywhere...

We has met the microbes & they be we.

“The child assumes that his relations to the inanimate world are of one pattern with those to the animate world of people: he fondles as he would his mother the

pretty thing that pleased him; he strikes the door that has slammed on him.' It should be added that he does the first because he is convinced that this pretty thing loves to be petted as much as he does; and he punishes the door because he is certain that the door slammed deliberately, out of evil intention.

"As Piaget has shown, the child's thinking remains animistic until the age of puberty. His parents and teachers tell him that things cannot feel and act; and as much as he may pretend to believe this to please these adults, or not to be ridiculed, deep down the child knows better. Subjected to the rational teachings of others, the child only buries his 'true knowledge' deeper in his soul and it remains untouched by rationality; but it can be formed and informed by what fairy tales have to say.

"To the eight-year-old (to quote Piaget's examples), the sun is alive because it gives light (and, one may add, it does that because it wants to.) To the child's animistic mind, the stone is alive because it can move, as it rolls down a hill. Even a twelve-and-a-half-year-old is convinced that a stream is alive and has a will because its water is flowing..." Says Bettelheim in *The Uses of Enchantment*, and his quote is from "Animism," a 1948 article by Ruth Benedict in *The Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*.

"This is the difference between us Romans and the Etruscans. We believe that lightning is caused by clouds colliding, whereas they believe that clouds collide in order to create lightning. Since they attribute everything to gods, they are led to believe not that events have a meaning because they have happened, but that they happen in order to express a meaning." Said Seneca, not too long after the earthly coming and going of a certain Essene prophet.

And how to signify, in light of Piaget et al's assertions, of Liu Zheng's belief that *the feelings of mountains and streams, grasses and trees, are not far from those of humans?*

Severe clear overhead. At human nose height, the air feels as friable as a molecule-thin ice sheet stretched over a puddle – one that shatters on the inhale. Yet all around, folks lurch about in a nacreous fog, through a world filled with innumerable frames for incomprehending it.

A.P. Dateline – Copenhagen: “Denmark will investigate claims that the CIA secretly used an airport on the Nordic country's remote Arctic territory of Greenland to transport prisoners in the U.S. war on terror, the prime minister said Thursday.

“Denmark, like many other European countries, began investigating reports in 2005 that the U.S. intelligence agency quietly touched down on their territory as part of the CIA's so-called ‘extraordinary rendition’ program.”

Alas... something's rotten in Grœnlendinga.

A Swiss outfit, USB AG which, measured by assets, is Europe's fattest piggy, posts the largest single loss by a bank, ever: \$12.5 billion.

Many and varied the uses of enchantment.

2/1 Venus and Jupiter less than a degree apart this dawn. And you could see it, but for the clouds.



In other places, however, rare visibility. Sabahattin Bilsel took the photo in Bodrum on the Turkish Riviera. That's Petronum (St. Peter's castle) illuminated on the right, a Hospitaller fortress from the early fifteenth century.

Over the next few days, the waning crescent moon will move in closer too. Quite a conjunction this trio will make.

Amidst a snow and ice storm of fantastical proportions, a whiteout-blackout that's cast China's chronically unreliable electrical supply into even higher relief, the mayor of Shanghai promises: "Power to the people."

A tale of two columns, of one front page. On the left, reading down, the four main headlines:

Microsoft bids \$44.6 Billion for Yahoo

U.S. Economy Unexpectedly Sheds 17,000 Jobs

Exxon Mobil Profit Sets Record Again

Dozens Killed in Worst Baghdad Attack in Months

...So let us not talk falsely now

The hour is getting late...

Y entonces, a la drachma, the deadcat DOW bounces up 92.83 point to levitate over the weekend at 12,743.19.

Sure, why not?

Paradoxical respiration.

Wow, that could have been serious!

WTF "could have been"? The patient's gone into cardiac arrest!

Yeah, but at least he doesn't have high blood pressure any more.

Of the sad collection of punters vying for the presidency, does McCain come closest to our present ego ideal? Certainly his appeal distills down to a collective wish to imagine ourselves as a nation of stoics who can take a licking and keep on ticking – a strong-willed yet resilient people able to endure captivity, who maintain their honor and individuality while being tortured and spat on by Asian devils and ultimately

emerge unbroken – spiritual survivors worthy of future success. No other candidate embodies this particular fairy tale, folding in as it does a strong dose of Orientalist fantasy that permits the continuation of our time-honored dissociation from the rest of the world even as we renew and strengthen the supposed fundamentals of our American character.

Titania + Bottom 4 Ever.

Strong magic Oberon's, no doubt. But who can hold a candle to the powers of enchantment when turned upon the self?

Faust. Come on, Mephistophilis, what shall we do?

Meph. Nay, I know not. We shall be curs'd with bell, book, and candle.

Faust. How! bell, book, and candle, – candle, book, and bell,

Forward and backward to curse Faustus to hell!

Anon you shall hear a hog grunt, a calf bleat, and an ass bray,

To herald the coming of Super Tuesday.

But tomorrow is Candlemas, Imbolc, St. Bridget's Day. And Staten Island Chuck – Punxutawney Phil's lower-profile cousin – when he emerges from his burrow, will he see his shadow, or no?

2/2 Holmes is out there, but has effectively disappeared from view – its comea grown too large for most optical telescopes' narrow field of view, and too faint for even powerful binoculars. Only the radio telescopes know what's up, but they're not talking.

But Punxsutawny Phil waxes voluble in his area of expertise, at least to those who understand his idiolect. At 7:25 this morning, Venus and Jupiter having faded but the moon hanging in to hear his prediction, Phil uttered the following: "There's a blue sky above and my shadow's quite clear. So... we're in for six more weeks of winter I fear!"

Chuck, however, begs to differ. Early spring it'll be says he.

Soon, neither groundhogs, nor people, nor pigeons will see the shadows of many an old Brooklyn building, given that yesterday a Federal appeals court ruled, by virtue of Gød knows what juridical logic, that Bruce Ratner's expropriation of privately-owned properties for his Atlantic Yards gambit is indeed constitutional.

Bruce has already torn down a great many structures there, and this will, eminently, facilitate a lot more swinging of hammers and balls. Will the ensuing field of devastation be visited any time soon by long Gehry tower shadows and the umbra of a wide, sweeping stadium? If you were a rat playing in the rubble's domain, you wouldn't hold your breath.

Just as securities aren't, there's little under the sun so unreal as real estate.

Yesterday too, an immensely tall crane buckled at a residential construction site in TriBeCa at Washington and Watts. No casualties, thankfully, in this accident in the heart of the domestic Green Zone. Boom folded about two thirds of the way up to the jib, hinged over on itself. Poor thing looks like a skeleton that tried to touch its toes and couldn't straighten up again.

Which prompts a recollection from when you were quite young of being over at Dr. Schiffman's office with your old man who was going to get a shot – pants down, leaning forward, elbows resting on the exam table. Apart from yourself, you'd never seen anyone given an injection before, so this felt like quite the privileged adult moment. And then something extraordinary happened. As he walked from his medicine cabinet toward your father's behind, Schiffman dropped the syringe and bent to pick it up. Froze. Lower back spasm. That was it. Did Jack ever get his shot? Maybe, but not that day.

Not quite 4 p.m. and the sky over the bay has gone utterly nacrescent, with slanted rays streaming through the cloudgaps at a darn near perfect 45° angle. The atmospheric stuff of religious conversion and yes, this time it works and finally you understand: the earth is a pearl nestled and chafing within a great oyster, which is itself but one mollusk in a vast bed among multitudes – multitudes! – of other beds, scattered across the floor of the indescribably vaster kosmik sea.

2/3 “The sun, the stone, and the water are believed to be inhabited by spirits very much like people, so they feel and act like people.

“To the child, there is no clear line separating objects from living things; and whatever has life has life very much like our own. If we do not understand what rocks and trees and animals have to tell us, the reason is that we are not sufficiently attuned to them. To the child... it seems reasonable to expect answers from those objects which arouse his curiosity... he expects the animal to talk about things which are really significant to him, as animals do in fairy tales, and as the child himself talks to his real

or toy animals. A child is convinced that the animal understands and feels with him, even though it does not show it openly.

“...Since all that moves is alive, the child can believe that the wind can talk and carry the hero to where he needs to go....” In animistic thinking, not only animals feel and think as we do, but even stones are alive; so to be turned into stone simply means that the being has to remain silent and unmoving for a time. By the same reasoning, it is entirely believable when previously silent objects begin to talk, give advice, and join the hero on his wanderings. And since everything is inhabited by a spirit similar to all other spirits...it is believable that man can change into animal or the other way around. ...Since there is no sharp line drawn between living and dead things, the latter too, can come to life.”

Wrote Bettelheim.

*Are you a beast of field and tree,
Or just a stronger child than me?*

Queried Stevenson.

Tomorrow at dawn, cloud cover permitting, you should be able to look east and construct Venus, Jupiter and an ever-slimming crescent moon as the vertices of a gorgeous scalene triangle. On verra. Ou non.

In any case, the *Stupors* are lining up by threes. Tonight: the Stupor Bowl, y mañana, Stupor Mundi. And the day following, Stupor Tuesday, which will likely determine who will get to proclaim: “I am the new Number Two. You are Number Six” for the entirety of the next episode of *The Prisoner*. And watch out for the huge

white ball, which, interestingly, takes the shape of an "O."

Book of wonderment. A new chapter writ every day.

Giants vs. Patriots, sure, play it out binary and in the open. Not so easy to penetrate the game of hidden power, where it may be the yin hand, the one less obvious, which delivers the decisive blow.

What does one say in a stupor of wonderment but "O!" Or "wow!" which frames the same void in the middle. So much hope thrown into the hole of O, so many Pilgrims yearning to feel lighter, more balloon-like, taken higher. Holding fast to the strings of a barely-contained gaseous orb while below and all around, every degree of social life spews out fast multiples of zero. And the body-self, thus levitated, loses not a gram of weight, remains material as ever, gains nothing but a broken bond between the soles and ground.

OMG:

0/1/0/1/0/1 ad nauseum or absurdum. O, to escape between the barcodes of the either/or world!

O for a Muse of fire, that would ascend

The brightest heaven of invention,

A kingdom for a stage, princes to act

And monarchs to behold the swelling scene!

*Then should the warlike Harry, like himself,
Assume the port of Mars; and at his heels,
Leash'd in like hounds, should famine, sword and fire
Crouch for employment. But pardon, and gentles all,
The flat unraised spirits that have dared
On this unworthy scaffold to bring forth
So great an object: can this cockpit hold
The vasty fields of France? or may we cram
Within this wooden O the very casques
That did affright the air at Agincourt?
O, pardon! since a crooked figure may
Attest in little place a million;
And let us, ciphers to this great accompt,
On your imaginary forces work.
Suppose within the girdle of these walls
Are now confined two mighty monarchies,
Whose high upreared and abutting fronts
The perilous narrow ocean parts asunder:
Piece out our imperfections with your thoughts;
Into a thousand parts divide on man,
And make imaginary puissance;
Think when we talk of horses, that you see them
Printing their proud hoofs i' the receiving earth;
For 'tis your thoughts that now must deck our kings,*

*Carry them here and there; jumping o'er times,
Turning the accomplishment of many years
Into an hour-glass: for the which supply,
Admit me Chorus to this history;
Who prologue-like your humble patience pray,
Gently to hear, kindly to judge, our play.
[Exit]*

These lines put into the mouth of a Prologue once, by a certain son of Avon who did well for himself in the Company of the King's men. And these words he gave to a Duke, exil'd for a time to the Forest of Arden:

*Now, my co-mates and brothers in exile,
Hath not old custom made this life more sweet
Than that of painted pomp? Are not these woods
More free from peril than the envious court?
Here feel we not the penalty of Adam, –
The seasons difference: as the icy fang
And churlish chiding of the winter's wind,
Which when it bites and blows upon my body,
Even till I shrink with cold, I smile and say,
'This is no flattery: these are counsellors
That feelingly persuade me what I am.'
Sweet are the uses of adversity;*

*Which, like the toad, ugly and venomous,
Wears yet a precious jewel in his head;
And this our life, exempt from public haunt,
Finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,
Sermons in stones, and good in everything.
I would not change it.*

Yet, like the bricks of a ruined wall, Lord, Lord, so many sisters and brothers who still believe, even now, that we can vote our way out of this massacre – who imagine from within their deep well of hope the sound of the cavalry's hoofbeats. Any minute they'll hear the bugle of deliverance. But when you're down a well, sounds are peculiarly deceptive, and one could be forgiven for mistaking things. No cavalry: there never was nor will be. Only a thundering heard of bears. And cloaked by the dust behind them, who knows – four horsemen? Or nothing at all.

Still a few brothers left who remember how to place one ruined brick upon another. And sisters who know the art of growing sustenance from even the most poisoned ground.

While it, itself, be change.