

3/7 Hoping to catch a glimpse of Venus and Mercury, you survey the skies and the city in the dawn's surly light. No seeing either of 'em, nor la lune. Nor a sign of what the day will bring.

It seems possible that McCain's candidacy, and more obliquely Hillary's constitute an attempt, however unconscious, by many Americans more or less of your age cohort, to deal with the legacy of the Vietnam War. At its best interpretation, this might be a sign of a maturing nation, or one yearning toward a grasp of its history, albeit beneath its own radar, and not necessarily in a manner that's likely to yield any sort of unflinching self-examination. Still it's interesting to speculate. After all, McCain is the real McCoy when it comes to reifications of the American role. He isn't, as John Kerry was, an earthbound deliverer of death. Rather McCain represents that abstracted-out aspect of the war machine our country had become – an out-of-the-body people, like demonic Jetsons, who gloried most of all in remote murders of a sort that seemingly bore no consequences for us. Thus McCain, on some level, embodies an old and creepy mythology of war, encapsulated gorgeously in *Achilles*, a reworking of the Greek material by Elizabeth Cook.

In one of the book's early scenes, Achilles, newly arrived Hades, grows anxious for news of his son Neoptolemus, last seen in a mêlée at the siege of Troy. Odysseus, who knows what's what assures Achilles: "All harm came from him. No harm came to him."

But despite the apparent protection of high tech and altitude, some harm did come to McCain. And quite probably in many a mind his torture at the hands of his captors somehow cancels out whatever blasting to pieces he perpetrated upon the

bodies of folks whose faces he could not see. The slate wiped clean. Or if anything, his suffering and survival weigh positively on his behalf. Very Christian, in a chthonic sense, if such a thing is possible, but with a mundane ending the long and short of which is that he comes off as how we'd like to see ourselves surviving crucifixion: high flyers, brought low, yet tough enough to survive and garner that second chance wherein we thrive as common folk who bear the scars of true and righteous experience. Our experience of extremes has let us find our center. No immortals we, just everyday heroes. Choose whatever fairy tale you like, add ego and mix.

Aiding Mac too perhaps, the archaic, yet still resonant WWI-era image of the pilot as a figure out of chivalric lore, whose gentlemanly single combat takes place in the ethereal realm, hence far removed from the industrialized hell of the trench war below. Again, that's not how it was or is, but it's how some folks may feel beneath the threshold of reason.

For her part, Hillary's associated with the same historical moment, at least inasmuch as she must have known boys who went off to war. And maybe even dated some pre-Bill, who served no more than he inhaled, yet still was bound up in those heightened times – times during which, in the buried awareness of your generation: *things went wrong*. And so, through Hill or Mac, we hope to thread our collective way, Theseus-like, out of this damned labyrinth of capital, consumption and carnage, and somehow get it right this time.

Where then does that leave O.? Given that one of his chief appeals lies in his implicit promise that we can simply take wing over trauma – up to and including the world economic meltdown – and soar directly toward the great future of all humankind. But what's struck you of late is how the Clinton camp's "lack of

experience” tag seems to finally be sticking. Why? Could it be that, on some level, the trope “lack of experience” means “you weren’t around to experience the Vietnam trauma, so how can you possibly fix us”? What do we mean by what we say? The first degree of meaning only or other meanings too, stuck deeper underground?

Once upon a time, not so many years ago, when Gwen was really a child, a certain venerable gentleman you knew as Mr. Litwin lived on the 18th floor of your building. You didn’t know much about him besides that he owned a dry goods business on Lower Broadway.

“Your daughter is really something.” That was his mantra every time met up in the elevator, whether you were with Gwen or not. Then he’d shake his head as if to change the subject he himself had brought up and say “But you’re too young to know.” Too young to know what?

Now Gwen was not generally shy with adults and Mr. Litwin bore no overtly menacing quality about him. If anything he looked like a cherub dressed up in a suit – usually three-piece – silk tie and fedora: white hair, pink cheeks clean shaven, talcum-powder sweet like he just came from the barbershop. Yet it used to be that whenever the elevator stopped at 18 and Mr. Litwin got on, Gwen would hide behind your leg and bury her face in your coat. It had to be his clumsy attempts at friendliness she found importuning. He’d reach out to try and chuck under her chin and say – too loud and deadpan to register as a joke – “why don’t you come live with me?”

So awkward were these chance encounters that you took it upon yourself to somehow turn the dynamic around. “This isn’t going to be easy,” you said. “But next time, the minute he gets into the elevator, before he can open his mouth, you say *Hello, Mr. Litwin!* Let’s try it. See what happens.” Gwen being little then, and much more

inclined than now to take what you said on faith, at the next opportunity gave it a shot, and – wonder of wonders – he stepped back as if struck by voltage. And thus began their first conversation – an exchange of pleasantries that lasted all the way to the lobby. Listening to them, you indulged in a Father Knows Best moment, the sweeter for its rarity.

Eventually Gwen grew so comfortable in Mr. Litwin's presence that she'd throw her arms around him when you'd encounter him, walking slowly to or from temple, getting his mail, or riding the elevator. He gave her Hanukah gelt, of course, and birthday money – always a \$20 bill, and there was no deterring him. And once or twice when you ran into him on Eighth Avenue, he bought a lottery ticket to share with her. Their birthdays were one day apart, hers on July 14th, and his on the 15th, so he must've figured there was a winner in that combination somewhere.

One Saturday morning with Gwen's still asleep, you took off for the café. Mr. Litwin got on the elevator, dapper as ever, dressed for synagogue. You traded hellos. And then he asked: "What's today?"

You looked at your watch and told him *the 19th*. But his question had been a set up.

"Tomorrow," he said, "April 20th. They renamed Lodz as a birthday present for Hitler. "Two hundred fifty thousand Poles, Germans and Jews. The Germans and Jews were the richest – they owned the factories and mills."

He grew voluble, more so than usual. You held the lobby door open for him, slowed your pace down to his totter. Past the sycamores lining the block between 25th and 24th Streets. Past the shoe man, Chicken Delight, Shangri-La Beauty Salon. Past Bassry's stand. At the corner of 23rd, he stopped.

“What was it like? You already know. If I told you, you wouldn’t believe me. What was it like? I went up to the top of the Empire State Building. I jumped off. I got up and walked away. Do you believe me? May 1st the Nazis tried to escape, but the Americans had cut the rail lines. May 2nd we were liberated. Soon we’ll all be gone. Twenty-six years old. Sixty-six pounds.”

The traffic signal flashed *WALK*. “Be well,” he said. “Be well,” you replied.

“I pray to God.” He started across the street. Then it came to you. Not long after you first moved in to Building 4, when you were maybe thirteen, Bea whispered – as though transmitting a dangerous knowledge, “Mr. Litwin was in Auschwitz” – something you’d completely managed to blank out in the intervening years. You were born in 1950, which made you, in an altogether deeper way than you could have imagined *too young to know*.

Aftercomers cannot guess the horror been. Pace, Gerard Manley Hopkins.

Estados Unidos

Un otra vez vencidos.

Which was the great fear of the Neocons, their central organizing trauma having been the flight from Saigon – an event, so they determined in the cockles of their innermost terror, whose repetition could only be prevented via outright world domination. And now that game is over. Yet still the American psyche, such as it is, finds itself both chewing on and being slowly consumed by Annam, Tonkin and Cochinchina, a serpentine nation that, taken together, is known as Vietnam.

3/8 Tremendous resources have gone into building millions of people who are fast becoming obsolete. No sooner thought and written down than the conversation at the next table starts to bleed into your awareness, nothing coherent, more like you're picking up on a change of tone. It's a Saturday a.m. at Le G., a different crowd by far than on weekdays. You've been deep into reading Tom B. and Gao's *The Essentials of Ba Gua*, but then up popped that sentence, triggered perhaps by the cumulative effect of the to-the-manor-born quality so many of the weekend customers, and particularly those immediately around you just now seem to possess. Who knows? At any rate, the two fellows at Table 4 – you're at Table 5 – are young and almost certainly gay. The one you can see best, owing to the diagonal sightline is doing most of the talking. He's handsome in a vastly top-heavy way, wears a navy blue zippered sweatshirt with piping along the sleeves and ITALIA in caps spaced across the chest, the final A coming to rest above a little appliquéd badge – the colors of the Italian flag in the shape of a shield. But the fellow doesn't vibe European.

O.K. Back to *zhan zhuang*, standing postures:

“Most important, whether standing is trained for purposes of health or self-defense, is that the body relaxes fully and expresses spirit. Relaxation must be both physical and mental. The spirit is expressed by the correct posture, which allows the energy to circulate unrestrained in the central channels, *ren mo* and *du mo*. As the body and mind relax the energy will then circulate through the meridians and reach the tips of the body. By practicing this way, eventually the body will automatically react to defend itself when attacked. This kind of practice will develop both a supporting, bracing force and a sudden springing, bursting force. The body is relaxed and soft, yet

can generate a sudden penetrating force. This is the so-called inch power.

In *zhan zhuang* exercises and in the practice of Ba Gua in general, it is important to avoid the three harms:

1. Holding the breath or forced breathing.
2. Labored use of strength.
3. Throwing out the chest and sucking in the abdomen..."

"I've been through all these scenarios," says ITALIA. "Is it better to let it just foreclose, or ask my family to pony up say \$50,000? Every month I shell out \$2,000 to the bank in interest alone. Maybe I should probably just rent it out for a few years..."

Asks his companion, "How much would you need to get per month?"

"Uh, \$2,400 – no – it'd have to be..."

You can't help it, you burst out laughing, for which the best cover is to return to your book. *Sí, tú sientes un poco de schadenfreude, y otra cualidad tambien.* You try to read but you can't see the words properly, because you're flashing on what Baudrillard said just before he died when his wife, Marine, asked "Jean, why are you smiling?" To which he replied, "What else is there to do?"

It is a funny world, innit? Just site where you site, Poppy. The mountains will move to you.

Essentials...: "It is also important to keep the neck straight and uplift the head while tucking or holding in the chin slightly. Touch the tip of the tongue to the roof of the mouth. The tailbone sinks under, the lower back is straight and the buttocks curved. Uplift the anus, and have a stretching out force in the upper body and an inward and outward wrapping force in the lower body. The palm, chest and soles are empty. Being empty in the chest, *qi* can then sink to *dantien*. Mind-intention and spirit

allow the energy to accumulate in the *dantien*."

The cops find a bicycle in a dumpster at 38th and Madison. Aha – the getaway vehicle!

Quoth the *Messenger*:

"The police recovered it about 7 a.m., a little more than three hours after the bombing, when workers – after hearing news reports of a bomber on a bicycle – called 911.

"The bicycle believed connected to the bombing is a blue Ross model and is in 'fairly' good shape, said the law enforcement official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because the investigation is continuing. 'We are operating on the premise that it is the bike,' the official said."

2 p.m. Whiteout and fierce wind-driven rain. The building is not palpably swaying, but your bedroom has taken on something of the quality of a crow's nest.

Never underestimate the power of a flower, the young woman sang in the tunnel ramp down to the subway platform at West 4th the other day, accompanying herself on guitar, the open case at her feet in anticipation of offerings. Her strong, almost Broadwayish voice and the quasi-familiar-sounding tune made you think this had to be a lyric from a musical, maybe even a song from *Hair* you'd forgotten. Yet when you got home and googled the line, nothing of that nature came up. Was she the author? In pulls the train, and the last you hear with echo and authority:

No, no, never underestimate the power of a flower

Come on – grow baby grow...

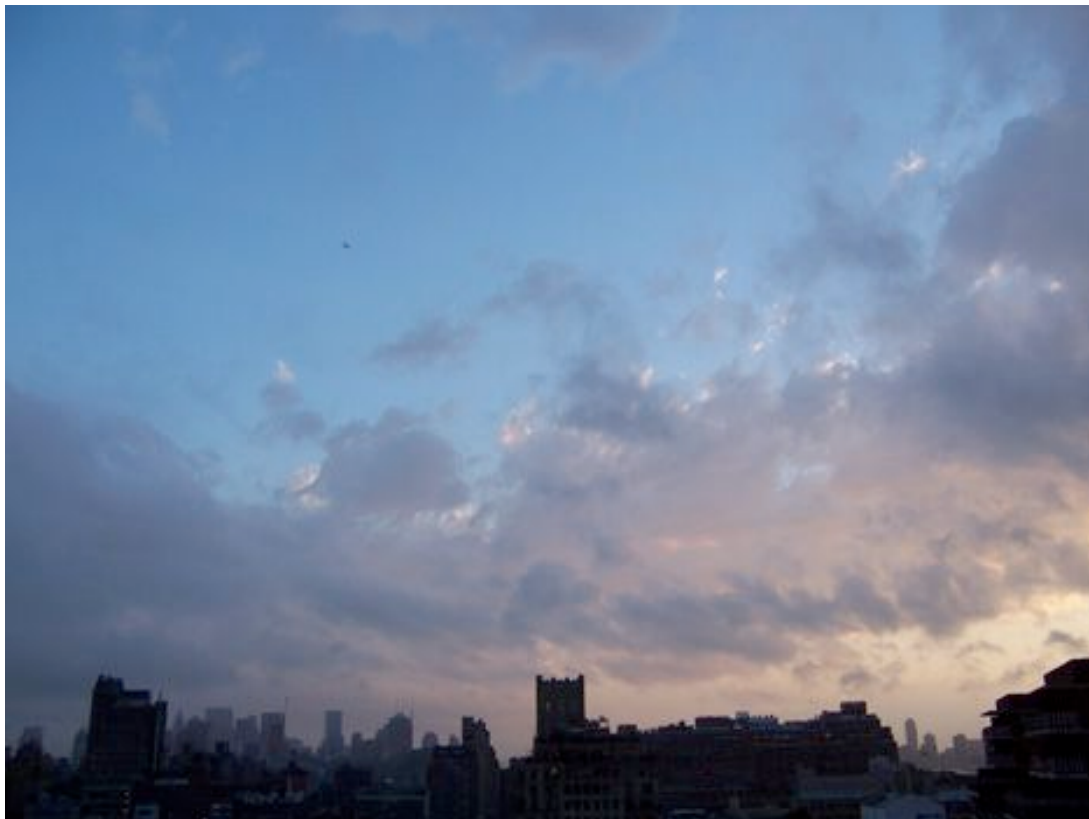
Yesterday, you sent out installment number seventeen, which contained the squib “Gee seven. G-hate” – a snipe at the Group of Seven, the annual finance and global strategy meetings of the most voracious and well-armed global pig-nations: Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom and United States, and also the Group of Eight: these same players plus Russia. Nor did it take E.A. long to read this week’s offering and shoot an email back: “Gee seven. G-hate. G-had.”

A lucky thing to have brilliant friends who remain emotionally alive.

Hit reply: “Gee seven. G-Hate. G-had. Gee, how they run.”

Exquisite corpse for interesting times.

What can we do Jean, but join you. Pourquoi? Et pourquoi pas?



5:39 pm. The winds continue strong, but no longer buffeting, while the blanket white outside your window has turned a thousand tints of its former self and added to its chroma, orange, pearlescent gray and blue. Never have you seen so many mini-atmospheres a-moving at once, the overcast dispersing on multiple levels in several directions, at speeds from bloody quick to breathtaking. Amidst it all here comes a plane, a 757 most likely, flying straight up the island – Fifth Avenue, you reckon – at around two thousand feet up. To the southwest, over lower Jersey City a range of cumulus hangs, apparently motionless, seeming vast as Himalayas, their upper peaks tinged peachpink in the setting sun. It's all there, alive as can be. And utterly fantastical. In the time it took to touch these keys, sensation of a new world born.



This moment, whatever it is, feels just as heady as the '60s. It possesses the same hurtling, hang-on-to-your-hat-never-mind-it's-blown-off quality that still resounds indelibly in your every fiber and bone. Danger yes, fear, horror, perhaps apocalypse. But terror, no. That spell's been broken. And for good or ill, the genie dreamed now visits us awake.

What naked creature feasts in Eden? Dare we discover what abides within these ripped-down gates? Surely we'll find out anyhow. Whether we go in to meet it, or the Created visits us.

6:46 pm. Suddenly, rain again, the wind whipping the trees like anything and banshee-howling past the corner of your building. Not sure, whether the wind wants to push your windows in or suck them out. But one thing's certain it's bent on tearing out the right angled bricks that cut its path, rework the sharp edge to a curve, the better to blow round.