

3/21 Beyond race or gender, an issue that seems evermore clear in leveraging Obama culturally apart from both Clinton and McCain, is the fact that he represents post-Vietnam America. Folks look at him and, however unconsciously, begin to believe he can move us collectively beyond that awful tarpit. Münchhausen, up to his armpits in the swamp, seizing his own pigtail and pulling himself free. But down on the ground, the situation's clear: My Lai, he lie, she lie, we lie, they lie. Like a rug with everything unowned swept under.

Pssst – don't mention the war.

Au fond, ad astra, and all else in between.

The kitchen sink.

Now, now the great culling of the fattened yet still feral turkeys. And it's nowhere near Thanksgiving.

Crossing Fifth Avenue at 23rd Street, his whole body inclined forward into the headwind a ragged man surges forward pausing every five or six steps to let out a blood-curdling scream.

At 24th and Eighth, a gray-bearded man with no discernable teeth staggers in the gale force of his own laughter.

Jesus, yo' time has come. But have a great weekend. I know you will.

And we, we who live another breath, time to humble yo'se'f, fo' de bell done rung.

Ad astra. Ad aspidistra. An import from Cathay that became, via Orwell, Sayres and a hudred thousand potted plants in a hundred thousand British windows, a symbol for everything mid-war and scaled-down, expectation wise – a grayed-out lower middle-class hanging in and hanging on, pot of tea to pot of tea, until...

Now the locus of the plant has shifted south and new species are evolving, fast as anything, in Vietnam.

McCain, Clinton, Obama: a catenary progression offset by about half a generation and spanning the waning Depression and post-WWII initiation of Omnipotent America straight through to post-Vietnam, end-of-the-petrol-party mongrelized globalization. Hilary's the center link, and if she goes, who knows?

And then there are the Jungian aspects to the affair – the media being at this stage no more nor less than a delivery system for archetypes, perhaps taking a bit of credit for the crafting of these figurines along the line.

Mac is Mars, but no longer bright red, tempered as he is with defeat turned moral victory. Hilary as Woman in both Her nurturing and devouring aspects. More a Hindu deity than a Christian one. Which has been and continues to be her problem. Obama – for all the black vs. white talk – really a deracinated, or perhaps mestizo, virgin prince out of a kind of New Age retelling of the Eleusinian mysteries. Christ-like in some ways – he “prays to Jesus” every night – yet vibes domesticated pagan. Or best

yet, a hybrid of chthonic and Calvinist – in the sense of the chosen – served up à la Starbucks.

Moreover, his blackness as such derives from East African origins, hence there's nothing, apart from hair texture and skin tone, that connects Obama's physiognomy, body language or general presence with the historical crime of chattel slavery and its still-ramifying injuries. Which is to say he simply does not code as "black" to any but the most symbolically frozen sensibilities. This lack of qualities wondrously permits Obama to bypass the guilt and fear circuits of a large proportion of the non-black electorate, leaving him open to other sorts of projection and allowing him to simultaneously be and not be many things to myriad people. And to become, all the more readily, Everything to his evangelists, disciples being too mild a word.

Which means Obama not only offers America a Space-Odyssey-like slingshot out of the ever re-traumatizing geostationary orbital groove Vietnam got us into – now monstrously augmented by stuck-in-quicksand sense to Iraq – but also a post-Christian, post-*Platoon* notion of Service that at any moment might transform into outright Sacrifice. All ends, to the degree that ends are not beginnings swaddled in winding shrouds, to be determined by forces we neither can, nor wish to see in operation. Any more than we want to imagine our parents in the act of making us, or know the timing and circumstances our own deaths. We'd rather just have the result arrive COD, and leave the mystery, like the hieroglyphics on Ashley Dupre's belly, to a collective "whatever."

Mac's being OK with an ad infinitum American military presence in Iraq rings very much harmoniously with Hitler's Thousand Year Reich in that they both posit a

future of dominance that is being absolutely undone by the dreamer's present actions. A la Warhola, a millennial reign reduced to a ten-minute YouTube clip. Yo, yo! Where's my other five minutes?

Born on a tide of congealed credit, Atlantic Yards, hideous brainchild of Bruce Ratner – its design to have been Speered by Frank Gehry (né Goldberg) – detaches itself from the landmass and drifts off, out beyond the continental shelf, where it sinks, slowly and with many a gurgle, to the bottom of the Hudson Canyon. Like a vanished glacier, the only traces it will leave in Brooklyn may be its rubbly moraine and some erratic depositions: a badly-built stadium, maybe a luxury high-rise or two. And a sign steamshoveled into the earth that reads:

*Eminent Domain has come and gone –
it left this crap to carry on.*

Worm moon. Robins head back north. Crow moon – they're cawing "down with winter, up the spring!" Crust moon because the snow surface hardens with the daily cycle of thaws and freezes. Sap moon – time to tap the sugar maples.

3/23 Gorgeousness of sky precipitates you out to where your tears freeze on the rims of your lower lids as they will in the near-to-zero headwind as you pedal west on 25th. You never see, no matter, how you try, the occupants of those funny little nests in the branches hanging over the street. Could these not be nests at all, but rather bunches of cast-off leaves that the breezes somehow accreted in specific configurations of

bough? Next time you'll look to the trees and the angles of the branches, ever seeking, if not a cause, at least an unknotting of story.

But what power of narrative will tell you why the numerous birds you hear on this block – and they are out and about in force and communicating vigorously – why their call sounds like *mee-nus! mee-nus!* – un faux ami for sure because *minus* is not French for “minus” in a subtractive sense, rather “putz,” “insignificant fool,” “wimp” – as in Cabrel’s lyric from the bull’s eye view of the toreador:

Je ne vais pas trembler devant

Ce pantin, ce minus...

I will not tremble before

This puppet, this washout...

Still, *minus, minus* is the avian chorus that greets your heroic effort to make the corner as the light flashes to solid red and hang a Louie onto Ninth, whereupon, still through the medium of half-iced tears the cornice of the little tenement with its collection of meteorological devices comes into view – whirligigs whirling, anemometers carouselling round – blurred yet dare you say gaily.

The gates of Le G. are still drawn across the storefront. Did you come too early? Is Mme. G. giving the staff a break by opening a bit late on Resurrection morning? Peer inside. There are the two lithe Israeli Danielles, blonde et brune, setting up the counter, and, in the shadows toward the back of the room, Marcos muscles the tables into order, a sergeant placing his laggard troops in a proper drill formation.

The clock above the register reads seven minutes to eight, best as you can judge from this angle. Can't be. You left home at 7:56 and between elevator and horizontal

travel it takes at very least six minutes to get here. Your cell says 8:03. Well, the clock inside is set for café time and you got to respect that. So you turn to face the sun, but no direct rays have made it over the rooves yet. Still the air's fast and stirring and different birds in the budding gingko across Ninth make a one-syllable call that does indeed sound like "cheap!"

Sure, while you're standing here trying to look cool, like this is all intentional, practice some qi gong, why not? "Concentrate the Spirit and Gaze at the Heel." Wu ji posture, which makes it look like you aren't doing anything at all. Head swivels left. Your eyes drift upward to gather, far away up Ninth, a herd of cars assembling at various red lights waiting for the cue to stampede south. Exhale, turn head and spine to the right. Black netting and scaffold surround the Seminary building being disassembled in order to construct a big, ugly condo. Affixed to the blue-painted plywood hoardings, a sign:

Financing provided by

HELABA

[corporate logo]

Landesbank Hessen-Thüringen

Next to which, another sign:

ARSENAL SCAFFOLD AND EQUIPMENT

95 Jersey Street

Babylon, NY

Long live the Holy Roman Empire! Long live the plain between Tigris and Euphrates! Exhale as you turn our head and spine. Long live Concentrate the Spirit and Gaze at the Heel.

Adoration of the Mystic Lamb

Never mind the duct tape.

Thus the three media-dominant candidates all represent different faces of a general yearning for change that expresses itself in the only way it can: wish-fulfillment. Change to benign black man. Change to beneficent woman. Change to post-Vietnam survivor-once-and-future-maybe-warrior-king. Cotton candy dreams. Pinkness is all.

Candidates: literally those clothed in white. Bright, shining. *Nuestras guías eligadas a la tierra prometida.*

But can we claim the innocence of Candide?

And I try, oh my god do I try

I try all the time, in this institution

And I pray, oh my god do I pray

I pray every single day

For a revolution

*And so I cry sometimes
When I'm lying in bed
Just to get it all out
What's in my head
And I am feeling a little peculiar
And so I wake in the morning
And I step outside
And I take a deep breath and I get real high
And I scream at the top of my lungs
What's going on?
And I say, hey hey hey hey
I said hey, what's going on?
Fifty-eight years and my life is still
Trying to get up that great big hill of hope
For a destination...*

Pace, 4 Non Blondes. Granted the lyric reads "twenty-five years and my life is still...," but what's thirty-three years between fellow-troubadours? Only a gender and a generation apart. And himself a natural blond as a young 'un, until it gradually darkened into brown, then headed for the hills.

"Obama's Talk Fuels Easter Sermons" trumpeteth the *Messenger*, and subheads: "Inspired by Senator Barack Obama's speech, some religious leaders plan to interweave race and resurrection."

Fuels. Good word that. Not far, in ear distance, from *fools*.

Rockets rain into the Green Zone as Cheney delivers, in corpus, his epistle to the Pharisees of the Middle East, an area more accurately called Northwest Sector, Centcom. The veep's sermon consists solely of the chant "Bomb-bomb-bomb, bomb-bomb Iran..." slightly shopworn via Mac who lets him have it royalty-free.

Soon then, absent an insurge of bedrock decency, or the intervention of some as-yet imperceptible extra-human force, candidates and Candides alike will find themselves even more deeply engulfed. Nor long before the cry wells up from a billion souls, sounding so much like Christ's plaint of despair at the threshold of enlightenment that it nearly decieves the ear: *Why hast Dow forsaken me?*



Muhammed Muheisen/Associated Press

The evil man stares down into the abyss. Which the *Times* captions: "Vice President Dick Cheney, visiting the Mideast in a bid to move the peace process forward, with the Palestinian president, Mahmoud Abbas, in Ramallah."

3/24 Pan station.

Cross Central Park after breakfast with T. at Sabarsky. Who's that granite fellow facing the back of the Met, with his frock coat and well-turned calf leaning against a partial Greek column? Ah, Hamilton. You flash on his face engraved on the \$10 bill and how fast this has become, not just abroad but at home too, the new fivespot.

Sit on a bench to write this and turn the better to listen to an interesting bird call. On the top rung of the back support a little plaque's been tacked:

GRACE SMITH PLOWS (1907-2002)

HERBERT CURTIS PLOWS (1907-1974)

LOVINGLY REMEMBERED FOR THEIR

DEVOTION TO FAMILY AND FRIENDS

When you focus your attention on the bird again, it's gone silent. Maybe flown off. Its slightly grating two-syllable call seemed to say "May-be," or "Ba-by," or "May-Day." Very hard to decide which it was closest to, or perhaps there were subtle variations that made the call sound slightly different each time it was uttered.

Helicopter and sirens to the east for a bit. Then another call starts up, a real "tweat!" repeated in such rapid succession you can't make out whether it's six or seven

notes. A slight modulation of pitch here too, but your ear's not finely attuned enough to grasp the pattern.

Hiss of car tires on the Park Drive and thumping sounds up north as though of plastic garbage cans being emptied. Crack of twig beneath passerby's foot. No proximate calls for long enough that your hands get cold. Time to pack it up. Cough of toddler on training-wheeled bike flying lime green and white streamers from the handlebars. "Push, push, push," says mom, hint of a German accent? "It's a little bit of a hill here, a little bit of a hill."

Mom's patient with the child, doesn't seem in a hurry. But even on the flat ground, daughter still pedals slowly, as though even that pace requires a lot of effort. From the back, two heads of identically-colored blonde hair, one wearing a little purple helmet. S'long Hamilton. Brrrr.



Louisa Gouliamaki/Agence France-Presse

Aris Messinis/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

— Getty Images

Strophe and counter-strophe on the *Messenger's* front stage, er, page. The joint caption reads: "Activists angered by China's crackdown in Tibet upstaged a flame-lighting ceremony in Greece."

Dithyramb it where the sun don't shine.

The D.O.D. confirms the four thousandth U.S. military death in Iraq and the Dow surges. Paradoxical respiration.

Never so great a contrast between surface and troglodyte realms. The subway atmosphere utterly leaden. The ads on one side of the car are devoted to an Irish whiskey whose Latin motto, ubiquitous on the blown-up label reads: *Sine Metu* – without fear. All along the other, posters for "Animal Planet," a TV show. "Same Planet, Different World," the slogan goes. Faces photographed close up and enhanced, the bright, liquid eyes of a dog, lemur and chimpanzee gaze out, at what? Bejeus! Could it be these simple creatures have gotten a taste for the Jameson now and are looking for their best friend in the bottom of a glass?

Not all the little packages arrive.

There are far fewer absolutes than non-absolutes in the world and most people find this distressing. Some people find it very distressing all the time, as do many people at one time or another.

To make up for the asymmetry of absolutes to non-absolutes, the former, as absolutes will do, present themselves as unmediated, non-negotiable, zero sum. But the non-absolutes, numerous as they are, mock the absolutes, even as the absolutes obliterate them, knowing that, in the non-end of the story, the absolutes last only an eyeblink – no time really. No time at all.

The night was dark

The sky was blue

Down the alley, the ice wagon flew.

Kilauea erupted last week for the first time since 1924. Though the sun is supposed to be in the quiet phase of its cycle, the multiple prominences of late have resembled a fiery Lambeth Walk.

The hemlock maneuver.