Euphoria

Noun. a state of intense happiness and self-confidence.

Psychology. a feeling of happiness, confidence, or well-being sometimes exaggerated in pathological states as mania.


Nissan
Lines Beyond the Ba

Jouissance: Journeys Beyond the Bed with Hélène Cixous

Cecily Davey

This article will propose that the symbol of the bed has played a central role in the writing of Hélène Cixous, from her earliest works onwards. Over the course of her continually evolving oeuvre, however, the associations which this object carries seem to vary considerably. Each of the texts which I will discuss in this article presents a different view of what the bed can be seen to symbolise. Whereas her early works link the bed with sleep, silence, passivity, and death; her later writing focuses on the bed as a scene of rebirth. This object becomes closely connected with dreaming in Cixous' writing, which represents for her an act of liberation, exploration, and discovery. As a symbol of the world of dreams, the bed is thus transformed into a place where the desires, voices, and creative forces of the unconscious can be expressed.

The diverse symbolism of the bed in Cixous' work raises several questions. How does this transition from death to rebirth, from repression to liberation, from silence to self-expression take place? Why does this transition happen? Furthermore, what does this suggest about the larger conceptual evolution that has taken place within her work over the years? It is the aim of this article to answer these questions by discussing a selection of texts which depict the bed in contrasting ways, such as her celebrated essay 'Sorties,' 'The Laugh of the Medusa,' 'Coming to Writing,' and 'The School of Dreams.' Despite the fact that this object reappears throughout these texts, its presence has been little discussed if not entirely overlooked by most existing scholarship on Cixous.1 By reflecting more closely on her representation of this object, I will argue that the

ambivalent symbolism of the bed may be seen to offer valuable insights into the wider evolution of Cixous' oeuvre.

In 'Sorties' – an essay which caused a storm in the world of French literary theory and revolutionised the study of women's writing – Cixous launches a direct attack on the myths of femininity which have pervaded western culture. Within the narrative traditions that serve as the foundations for this culture, Cixous argues that 'woman is always associated with passivity.'2 'Either a woman is passive or she does not exist,' she continues (p. 64). 'What is left of her is unthinkable, unthought' (p. 64). Integral to her critique of such narratives are the fairy tales that frequently represent women as occupying bed-ridden positions. The horizontality of women in these tales is fundamentally linked, Cixous suggests, to the myth which depicts femininity as the epitome of passivity, silence, and helplessness.

A prime example is the tale of 'Sleeping Beauty,' in which a woman falls under a spell that puts her to sleep for a thousand years and can only be broken by the kiss of a prince. Such a fairy tale exemplifies a stereotypically phallocentric representation of male desire which expresses itself through the power to arouse and awaken. The narrative of this tale places the man in an active position which grants him the ability to exercise this power. In order for him to do this successfully, however, the only position which the woman can occupy in the narrative is one of passivity in which she must obediently reflect, follow, and fulfil the call of male desire. Her awakening does not realise her existence as a woman in her own right, but rather as the universal phantasy of a woman whose existence is

only validated by her ability to remain desirable. This concept of feminine desirability is one which depends on her not having the power to assert her own desire. As Cixous describes: 'She sleeps, she is intact, eternal, absolutely powerless' (p. 66). Female desire is not allowed to play an active role nor even to be expressed openly. The woman's allure – and thus her value – depends on her remaining passive, silent, and horizontal, Cixous argues.

The predicament of the woman who must supress her own desire in order to remain desirable is not confined to the fairy tales of past societies. The myth of feminine desirability which such tales re-inscribe may be seen as having a continuing influence on the way in which femininity is conceptualised in contemporary culture. In response to the fate of the female protagonist in 'Sleeping Beauty' and also 'Snow White,' Cixous insists that:

One cannot say of the following history "it's just a story." It's a tale still true today. Most women who have awakened remember having slept, having been put to sleep. Once upon a time … once … and once again. Beauties slept in their woods, waiting for princes to come and wake them up. In their beds, in their glass coffins, in their childhood forests like dead women. Beautiful, but passive; hence desirable: all mystery emanates from them (p. 66).

What Cixous calls for in 'Sorties' is an awakening to the detrimental effects of these narratives, for women as well as for men. To continue to play along with the roles of princess and prince confines the sexes within a repressive system in which masculine desire can only be expressed by asserting itself over the feminine. If we overlook the pervasive influence of

Beware of the Bed

such fairy tales within our literary and cultural history, this essay warns, we run the risk of letting their seductive but dangerous fantasies turn into an inescapable reality.3

The message which 'Sorties' seems to convey is that we – and women in particular – should "Beware of the Bed". As a symbolic object, the bed bears a special significance within Cixous' argument, as it is the journey 'from bed to bed' that maps the 'history' of women's lives throughout the centuries of western civilisation (p. 66). 'Bride bed, child bed, bed of death,' Cixous states, 'thus woman's trajectory is traced as she inscribes herself from bed to bed' (p. 66). This 'trajectory' provides a crucial example of Cixous' use of the bed as a symbol of the repression of women (p. 66). Cixous' depiction of their bed-ridden predicament lifts the lid of a Pandora's Box full of potentially incendiary questions. Is this predicament the result of the tyranny of man's desire? Or of woman's inability to challenge this tyranny? Is it a result of man's manipulation of the myth of femininity? Or of woman's complicity with this myth? 'Sorties' is an essay which delights in confronting such difficult issues directly, without the slightest hint of shying away from provocative – or even invective – rhetorical tactics. Though this essay leaves several of the questions it raises unresolved, Cixous' impassioned tour de force of feminist polemic does provide a powerfully unequivocal point of view on what women must do to escape a life of confinement to the bedroom. In order to write, to live, and to learn how to love herself, woman must wake up, rise up, and leave her bed behind.

In 'The Laugh of the Medusa' Cixous continues her critique of the repression of the feminine in literature and culture from a slightly different yet no less incisive perspective. As a condensed version of 'Sorties,' this essay interrogates the way in which we use language as a symbolic system of opposites that insists on the division of the sexes. From the oppositional couple of man/woman stems a countless number of other binary dichotomies: vertical/horizontal, active/passive, day/night, sun/moon, awake/asleep, light/dark etc. The point that Cixous is trying to make here is that the feminine has traditionally been associated with the latter half of these dichotomies, in other words, the inferior side.

In 'The Laugh of the Medusa' Cixous takes particular issue with the association of femininity with darkness and focuses on deconstructing the conceptual connection between the two. The association of what is woman – and more specifically what is understood to be her sexuality – with what is dark is seen as problematic by Cixous for several reasons. Whilst this association allows for a certain kind of mystique which may be considered by some to be an asset, it also has serious consequences for the way in which the sexuality of woman can be inscribed in language. Cixous' deconstruction of the supposed darkness of femininity considers its origins in the classical myth of the Medusa, which in turn had a profound influence on Freud's psychoanalytic theories of female sexuality.4 The image of the Medusa – lurking in the shadows with her face obscured by a swarming mass of phallic-like snakes for hair – represents for Freud the monstrous mystery of the female sex. The shadows in which this monster dwells are described by Freud as the 'dark continent' of female sexuality; an un-

You can't see anything in the dark, you're afraid.

explorable realm which his illuminating methods of psychoanalysis found impossible to fully penetrate.5

Despite the fact that Freud admitted defeat in his attempts to understand the inner secrets of the female sexual psyche, he did nevertheless succeed in exposing the origins of the conceptual association between femininity and darkness which had endured for centuries and remained deeply ingrained in the collective consciousness of society. It is this association, argues Cixous, that is responsible for 'the repression that has kept [women] in the "dark" – that dark which people have been trying to make [women] accept as their attribute.'6 The consequence of this association which we see re-inscribed in Freudian psychoanalytic discourse is that women are led to believe that they should regard their sexuality with a sense of fear.

As Cixous describes: 'Your continent is dark. Dark is dangerous. You can't see anything in the dark, you're afraid. Don't move, you might fall. Most of all: don't go into the forest. And so we have internalized this horror of the dark' (p. 2041).

The echo of the forbidden forests of fairy tales within Cixous' words here also resonates with the fear of a wild and sinister landscape that lies outside the laws of civilised society. Freud's theory of female sexuality suggests that this landscape is one which dwells within the dark recesses of every woman, and that this darkness conceals not only what is undesirable but also monstrous, dangerous, and deadly. The 'phantasm of woman as a "dark continent"' has effectively obscured any attempt to allow female sexuality to be represented in a different light, claims Cixous (p. 2041). Women have been taught to 'censor' whatever desires inexplicably escape from the impenetrable depths of their unconscious (p. 2043). The central impetus of Cixous' argument in 'The Laugh of the Medusa' is therefore to prove conversely that the "dark continent" which women have come to represent is'neither dark nor unexplorable' (Cixous' italics): 'It is still unexplored only because we've been made to believe that it was too dark to be explorable' (pp. 2041, 2048).

What consequences does this argument therefore have for the symbolism of the bed within Cixous' work? 'The Laugh of the Medusa' suggests that although the bed may at first seem to represent a symbol of woman's repression, the relationship between femininity, sexuality, and the unconscious calls for further exploration. May the bed be seen instead as a place where such an exploration could take place? Could the bed in fact come to represent the playground for the creative voices of the unconscious, rather than the scene of their silencing? Both of these suggestions are ones which arise from the essay's discussion of the darkness that seems to surround the issue of the female sexuality. Rather than calling for women to leave their beds behind, 'The Laugh of the Medusa' contrastingly sends a message that suggests it is essential for us to reconsider what takes place within our beds at night in order to uncover what lies behind the veil of the sleeping mind. In this essay, Cixous represents the unconscious as a 'limitless country' which we can only access by journeying into the darkness that we have been forbidden to enter (p. 2043). As the second half of this article aims to demonstrate, the bed has a vital role to play within the journey of discovery that Cixous encourages her readers to take.

In 'Coming to Writing,' Cixous explains why the bed must be the starting point for this journey. The essay exemplifies the turn in Cixous' perspective from her focus on the negative associations of sleeping towards an interest in the positive associations of dreaming. Whereas her earlier essays tended to link sleeping with death, Cixous now starts to consider the power of dreaming as a mode of rebirth. In contrast to 'Sorties' in which she calls for women to wake up to the dangers of sleeping through their lives in silence, Cixous now encourages women to sleep in order to dream, as it is only through dreaming that the silenced desires of the unconscious can be released. As contradictory as this may seem, 'Coming to Writing' provides a cogent argument for the importance of dreams as a significant source of inspiration for Cixous as a writer of what she calls écriture féminine; a style of expression which brings the desires, sensations, and rhythms of the body into language. In this essay she describes écriture féminine through the acts of 'writing, dreaming, delivering; being my own daughter of every day.'7

By practicing these 'acts of birth every day,' Cixous suggests that it is possible for us to gain access to an endless wellspring of creativity within

Don't move, you might fall.


Don’t move,
you might
fall.

our own bodies (p. 6). It is significant to note here that the essay's original French title – 'La venue à l'écriture' – can also be translated as 'Her Birth in Writing.'8

The journeys which we make when dreaming are ones which lead us towards the route to rebirth, a notion which Cixous conceptualises in 'Coming to Writing' as the most profound experience of awakening. This awakening involves the liberation of the libidinal forces of the unconscious, enabling our bodily desires to be given voice to in language. Dreaming may therefore be seen as a creative practice of particular relevance to women, whose sexual desires – as Cixous argues in 'The Laugh of the Medusa' – have been subject to repression, forbidden expression, and kept shrouded in darkness. As a highly transgressive activity, Cixous suggests that dreaming will allow woman to awaken her innermost desires, and by giving expression to them, she will revolutionise the way in which her body is represented within the symbolic order of language. As Cixous describes in 'Coming to Writing':

from dream to dream you wake up more and more conscious, more and more woman. The more you let yourself dream, the more you let yourself be worked through, the more you let yourself be disturbed, pursued, threatened, loved, the more you write, the more you escape the censor, the more the woman in you is affirmed, discovered, and invented (p. 55).

The idea of dreaming as a way of escaping censorship is one which also resonates with 'The Laugh of the Medusa,' in which Cixous proposes that the constraints of a phallocentric society have prevented woman's writing by censoring her body, her breath, and thus her voice as well. Once women have learned how to harness the power of dreams, however, their unconscious will become an irrepressible source of inspiration from which écriture féminine will freely flow.

Cixous also returns to the imagery of the forest in 'Coming to Writing,' which appears in her earlier work as a conflation of the notions of darkness, danger, and monstrosity. In this essay, however, Cixous depicts the forest as a magical realm of travel and discovery. She urges women to explore the forests they have been forbidden from entering by participating in the exploratory practice of dreaming. Cixous extols the unique ability that dreams have to transport us beyond boundaries, into new territories, and thus deeper into ourselves. The process of self-exploration, Cixous claims, will enable women to learn to listen to their inner voices, impulses, and desires. This process is portrayed by Cixous as one which involves developing a relationship with one's dreams as one would with a lover. She describes her relationship with her own dreams in the most intimate and sensual terms, suggesting an exuberant lack of inhibition in her nightly explorations:

They lead you into their gardens, they invite you into their forests, they make you explore their regions, they inaugurate their continents. Close your eyes and love them: you are at home in their lands, they visit you and you visit them, their sexes lavish their secrets on you. What you didn't know they teach you, and you teach them what you learn from them. If you love them, each woman adds herself to you, and you become morewoman [sic] (p. 55).

As this passage suggests, the joys of travelling are as central to Cixous' practice of dreaming as they are also to her practice of writing. The pleasure involved in all three indissociable acts is encapsulated by Cixous in the chiasmatic aphorism for which 'Coming to Writing' is famed: 'Write, dream, enjoy, be dreamed, enjoyed, written' (p. 56). This essay demonstrates that writing for Cixous starts with embarking on a journey; a journey which begins in the bed, travels through the body, and voyages on into the infinite expanses of the landscape of the unconscious that lie within. 'Worldwide my unconscious, worldwide my body,' she writes (p. 56). The bed can thus be seen to act as the gateway to 'the voyage, the voyager' and 'the body of travel' (p. 56). Does this suggest that the bed as a symbolic object now occupies a new position of significance within Cixous' work? If so, how does Cixous continue to use the image of the bed to illustrate the creative processes involved in her writing? More importantly, what does her changing representation of this symbolic object say about the shifting concerns of her work from 'Sorties' onwards?

Before attempting to answer these questions, I would like to consider one final text which is also notable for its use of the image of the bed. 'The School of Dreams' in Cixous' collection Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing elaborates in many ways her earlier attempts to liberate the creative forces of the unconscious. Dreaming – as a way of crossing boundaries and escaping constraints – continues to play a central role in her effort to reconceptualise creativity, sexuality, and the representation of the body in writing. Although 'The School of Dreams' is not as explicitly concerned with the practice of écriture féminine as the

three essays discussed previously, it does nevertheless continue to reflect on why Cixous' nocturnal adventures remain an important source of inspiration in her work. 'Dreams teach us'; she states here, 'They teach us how to write.'9 In this collection she depicts her 'ladder of writing' as having three rungs which one descends rather than ascends, with each rung representing a different aspect of the creative process. 'The first moment in writing is the School of the Dead,' 'the second moment of writing is the School of Dreams,' and the third moment 'is the School of Roots.'10 This description of her creative process suggests that dreams are a vital element in Cixous' work because they provide the transitional middle step which allows her to travel from the first to the last rung on the 'ladder of writing.'

'The School of Dreams' is an essay which carries a particular significance in relation to the discussion of the symbolism of the bed because it illustrates how this object continues to acquire new meanings within Cixous' work. She suggests in this text that although her nocturnal travels begin in the bed, dreaming must also involve journeying below and beyond it. In the section of the essay entitled 'The School of Dreams is Located Under the Bed,' Cixous explains why this is necessary by drawing once more on the recurring motifs of fairy tales and forests (p. 63). However, unlike 'Sleeping Beauty' and 'Snow White,' the tale which Cixous focuses on here provides a positive example of woman's self-expression rather than a negative example of her repression. Known as 'The Twelve Dancing Princesses' or 'The Worn-Out Dancing Shoes,' Cixous recounts the basic narrative characteristics of this story:

I have a faint recollection from an apparently naïve Grimm's Tale of a king whose daughters were ruining him. He kept them carefully locked in, as is proper, and didn't know why each day they needed to change their shoes. The daughters mysteriously wore out their shoes. Up until the day the king planted a spy to throw light on this matter. At nightfall the daughters pulled the bed aside, lifted up the trap door, climbed down the ladder beneath the palace, and went out into the forest and danced all night (pp. 63-64).

Along with the imagery of the bed, the forest, and the darkness of the night, this tale includes several other elements which are of interest to Cixous; walking, dancing, travelling, and taking pleasure in the transgressive act of expressing bodily desire. The story of the princesses who are not only unafraid to enter the forest at night but also revel in the delight of doing what is forbidden represents 'the perfect metaphor for the School of Dreams' according to Cixous (p. 64). This is because it combines all the elements that are necessary for journeying into the unconscious: 'Walking, dancing, pleasure,' and in particular 'sexual pleasure' – or to use the French term that encapsulates so poetically the essence of Cixous' argument – 'jouissance' (p. 64). The parallels between this fairy tale and Cixous' creative process are clear. As she states in 'The School of Dreams,' both writing and dreaming involve 'traversing the forest, journeying through the world' (p. 64). One must travel into the darkness 'using all available means of transport,' including one's 'own body' (p. 64).

Yet what does the bed signify in this parable for the pursuit of bodily pleasure? What are the symbolic

connotations of the princesses' displacement of the bed? From calling for the need for women to be awoken from their silent slumbers to suggesting that they should instead be encouraged to delve deeper into the nocturnal world of their dreams, Cixous seems to be proposing yet another message in this essay. Rather than assuming that dreaming is an act which takes place exclusively within the bed, Cixous implies that in order to travel towards the depths of the unconscious one must descend below the bed as well. The story of the princesses who escape through the trap door in their bedroom floor serves to illustrate this notion of descent as a journey towards enlightenment which must take place within the darkness of the night. Cixous describes this journey most lucidly in the passage below:

In order to go to the School of Dreams, something must be displaced, starting with the bed […] One must go on foot, with the body, one has to go away, leave the self. How far must one not arrive in order to write, how far must one wander and wear out and have pleasure? One must walk as far as the night. One's own night. Walking through the self towards the dark (p. 65).

As this passage demonstrates, what began as an inward journey of self-discovery has now turned into a journey that departs from the self and travels beyond it. What began as a cry for her readers to rise up from the bed has now turned into a call for them to descend below it. How is it possible to make sense of such a significant shift in Cixous' use of the image of this object within her work?

I would propose that the ambivalent symbolism of the bed may ultimately be understood as an indication of Cixous' change in focus from specific issues relating to the repression of female sexuality towards more universal questions about the expression of the body in the writing process. There is also a marked difference in the tone of her early argumentative texts, as exemplified most powerfully by 'Sorties' and 'The Laugh of the Medusa,' when compared to the more reflective and discursive style of Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing. Furthermore, it is significant to note that the 'The School of Dreams,' unlike the first three essays analysed in this article, does not assume that the majority of its readers will be women. Dreams are, after all, a phenomenon which occurs in the beds of both men and women alike. Indeed, it is whilst dreaming that we encounter the rare opportunity to experiment with the bodies, sexualities, and identities that define our existence in our waking lives. Perhaps the most persuasive way to account for the differing representations of the bed in Cixous' writing would therefore be to see this symbolic object as the locus of an incessant process of experimentation in which our understanding of sexuality, creativity, and the act of writing itself is continually being challenged.

The Laughing Heart

The Laughing Heart
Charles Bukowski

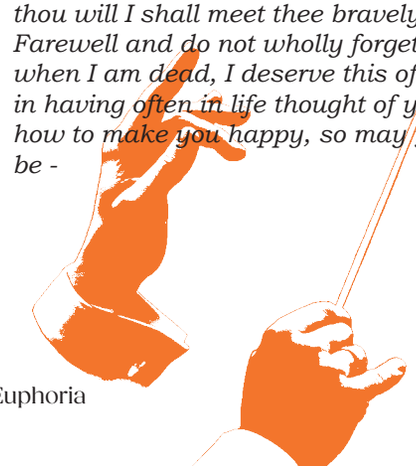
your life is your life
don't let it be clubbed into dank submission.
be on the watch.
there are ways out.
there is light somewhere.
it may not be much light but
it beats the darkness.
be on the watch.
the gods will offer you chances.
know them.
take them.
you can't beat death but
you can beat death in life, sometimes.
and the more often you learn to do it,
the more light there will be.
your life is your life.
know it while you have it.
you are marvelous
the gods wait to delight
in you.


Heritage

Heiligenstadt
Ludwig van Beethoven

O you men who think or say that I am malevolent, stubborn or misanthropic, how greatly do you wrong me, you do not know the secret causes of my seeming, from childhood my heart and mind were disposed to the gentle feelings of good will, I was even ever eager to accomplish great deeds, but reflect now that for six years I have been a hopeless case, aggravated by senseless physicians, cheated year after year in the hope of improvement, finally compelled to face the prospect of a lasting malady (whose cure will take years or, perhaps, be impossible), born with an ardent and lively temperament, even susceptible to the diversions of society, I was compelled early to isolate myself, to live in loneliness, when I at times tried to forget all this, O how harshly was I repulsed by the doubly sad experience of my bad hearing, and yet it was impossible for me to say to men speak louder, shout, for I am deaf. Ah how could I possibly admit such an infirmity in the one sense which should have been more perfect in me than in others, a sense which I once possessed in highest perfection, a perfection such as few surely in my profession enjoy or have enjoyed — O I cannot do it, therefore forgive me when you see me draw back when I would gladly mingle with you, my misfortune is doubly painful because it must lead to my being misunderstood, for me there can be no recreations in society of my fellows, refined intercourse, mutual exchange of thought, only just as little as the greatest needs command may I mix with society, I must live like an exile, if I approach near to people a hot terror seizes upon me, a fear that I may be subjected to the danger of letting my condition be observed — thus it has been during

the last half year which I spent in the country, commanded by my intelligent physician to spare my hearing as much as possible, in this almost meeting my present natural disposition, although I sometimes ran counter to it yielding to my inclination for society, but what a humiliation when one stood beside me and heard a flute in the distance and I heard nothing, or someone heard the shepherd singing and again I heard nothing, such incidents brought me to the verge of despair, but little more and I would have put an end to my life — only Art it was that withheld me, ah it seemed impossible to leave the world until I had produced all that I felt called upon me to produce, and so I endured this wretched existence — truly wretched, an excitable body which a sudden change can throw from the best into the worst state — Patience — it is said that I must now choose for my guide, I have done so, I hope my determination will remain firm to endure until it please the inexorable parcae to break the thread, perhaps I shall get better, perhaps not, I am prepared. Forced already in my 28th year to become a philosopher, O it is not easy, less easy for the artist than for anyone else — Divine One thou lookest into my inmost soul, thou knowest it, thou knowest that love of man and desire to do good live therein. O men, when some day you read these words, reflect that you did me wrong and let the unfortunate one comfort himself and find one of his kind who despite all obstacles of nature yet did all that was in his power to be accepted among worthy artists and men. You my brothers Carl and [Johann] as soon as I am dead if Dr. Schmid is still alive ask him in my name to describe my malady and attach this document to the history of my illness so that so far as possible at least the world may become reconciled with me after my death. At the same time I declare you two to be the heirs to my small fortune (if so it can be called), divide it fairly, bear with and help each other, what injury you have done me you know was long ago forgiven. To you brother Carl I give special thanks for the attachment you have displayed towards me of late. It is my wish that your lives be better and freer from care than I have had, recommend virtue to your children, it alone can give happiness, not money, I speak from experience, it was virtue that upheld me in misery, to it next to my art I owe the fact that I did not end my life with suicide. — Farewell and love each other — I thank all my friends, particularly Prince Lichnowsky and Professor Schmid — I desire that the instruments from Prince L. be preserved by one of you but let no quarrel result from this, so soon as they can serve you better purpose sell them, how glad will I be if I can still be helpful to you in my grave — with joy I hasten towards death — if it comes before I shall have had an opportunity to show all my artistic capacities it will still come too early for me despite my hard fate and I shall probably wish it had come later — but even then I am satisfied, will it not free me from my state of endless suffering? Come when thou will I shall meet thee bravely. — Farewell and do not wholly forget me when I am dead, I deserve this of you in having often in life thought of you how to make you happy, so may you be -

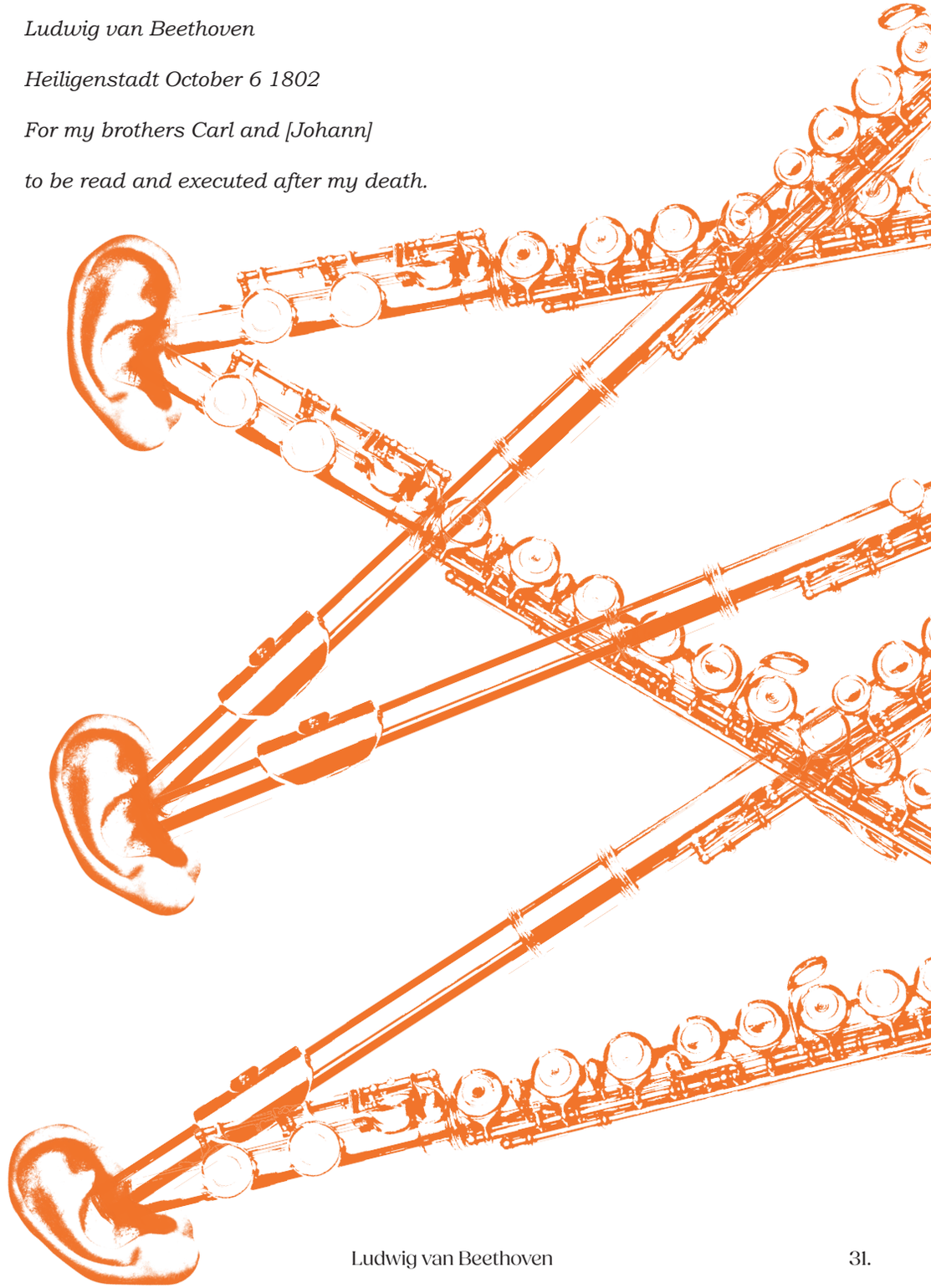


Ludwig van Beethoven

Heiligenstadt October 6 1802

For my brothers Carl and [Johann]

to be read and executed after my death.




I've Been to the Mountaintop

Ive Been to the Mountiantop
Dr Martin Luther King Jr

Thank you very kindly, my friends. As I listened to Ralph Abernathy and his eloquent and generous introduction and then thought about myself, I wondered who he was talking about. It's always good to have your closest friend and associate to say something good about you. And Ralph Abernathy is the best friend that I have in the world. I'm delighted to see each of you here tonight in spite of a storm warning. You reveal that you are determined to go on anyhow.

Something is happening in Memphis; something is happening in our world. And you know, if I were standing at the beginning of time, with the possibility of taking a kind of general and panoramic view of the whole of human history up to now, and the Almighty said to me, "Martin Luther King, which age would you like to live in?" I would take my mental flight by Egypt and I would watch God's children in their magnificent trek from the dark dungeons of Egypt through, or rather across the Red Sea, through the wilderness on toward the promised land. And in spite of its magnificence, I wouldn't stop there.

I would move on by Greece and take my mind to Mount Olympus. And I would see Plato, Aristotle, Socrates, Euripides and Aristophanes assembled around the Parthenon. And I would watch them around the Parthenon as they discussed the great and eternal issues of reality. But I wouldn't stop there.

I would go on, even to the great heyday of the Roman Empire. And I would see developments around there, through various emperors and leaders.

But I wouldn't stop there.

I would even come up to the day of the Renaissance, and get a quick picture of all that the Renaissance did for the cultural and aesthetic life of man. But I wouldn't stop there.

I would even go by the way that the man for whom I am named had his habitat. And I would watch Martin Luther as he tacked his ninety-five theses on the door at the church of Wittenberg. But I wouldn't stop there.

I would come on up even to 1863, and watch a vacillating President by the name of Abraham Lincoln finally come to the conclusion that he had to sign the Emancipation Proclamation. But I wouldn't stop there.

I would even come up to the early thirties, and see a man grappling with the problems of the bankruptcy of his nation. And come with an eloquent cry that we have nothing to fear but "fear itself." But I wouldn't stop there.

Strangely enough, I would turn to the Almighty, and say, "If you allow me to live just a few years in the second half of the 20th century, I will be happy."

Now that's a strange statement to make, because the world is all messed up. The nation is sick. Trouble is in the land; confusion all around. That's a strange statement. But I know, somehow, that only when it is dark enough can you see the stars. And I see God working in this period of the twentieth century in a way that men, in some strange way, are responding.

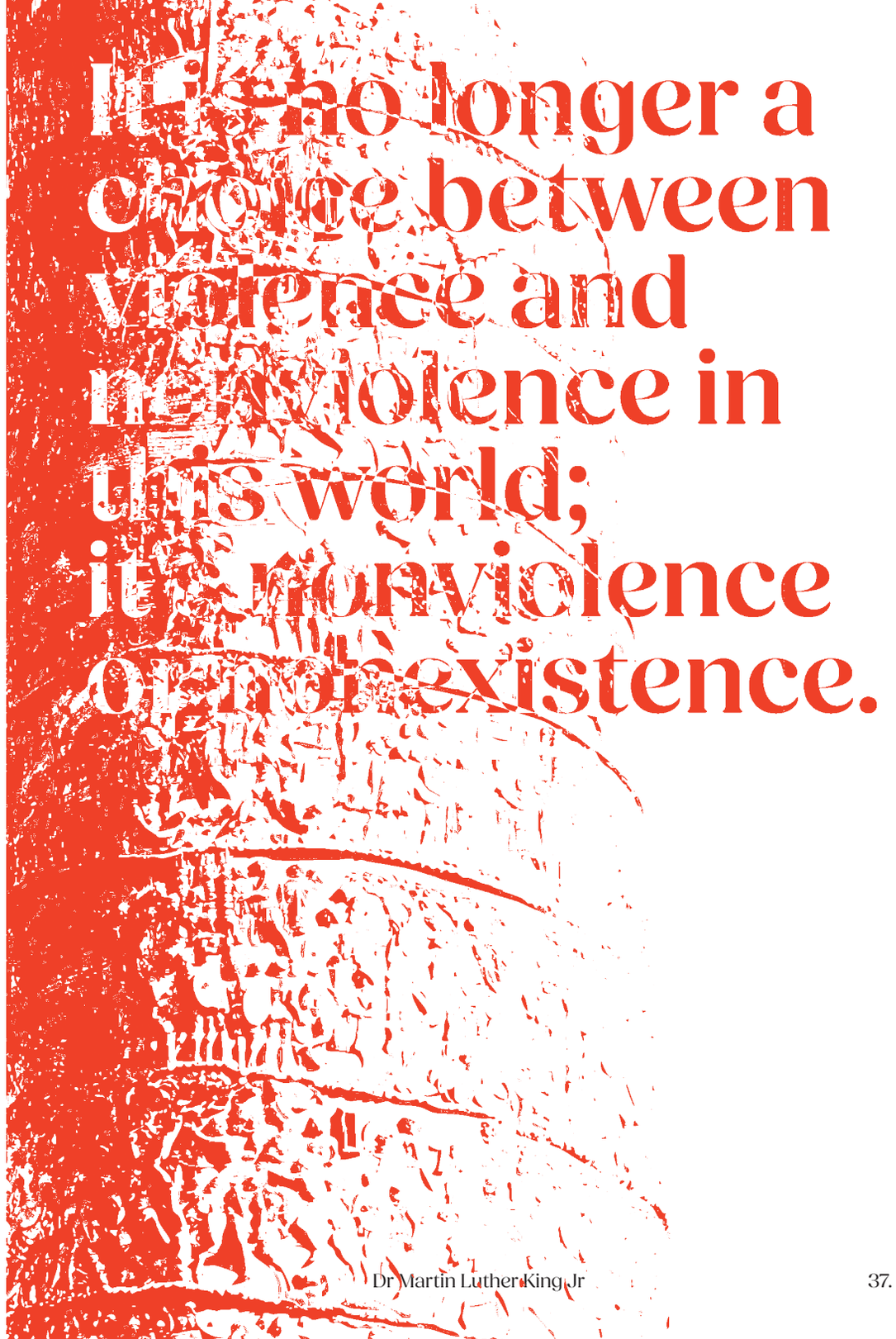
Something is happening in our world. The masses of people are rising up. And wherever they are assembled today, whether they are in Johannesburg, South Africa; Nairobi, Kenya; Accra, Ghana; New York City; Atlanta, Georgia; Jackson, Mississippi; or Memphis, Tennessee -- the cry is always the same: "We want to be free."

And another reason that I'm happy to live in this period is that we have been forced to a point where we are going to have to grapple with the problems that men have been trying to grapple with through history, but the demands didn't force them to do it. Survival demands that we grapple with them. Men, for years now, have been talking about war and peace. But now, no longer can they just talk about it. It is no longer a choice between violence and nonviolence in this world; it's nonviolence or nonexistence. That is where we are today.

And also in the human rights revolution, if something isn't done, and done in a hurry, to bring the colored peoples of the world out of their long years of poverty, their long years of hurt and neglect, the whole world is doomed. Now, I'm just happy that God has allowed me to live in this period to see what is unfolding. And I'm happy that He's allowed me to be in Memphis.

I can remember -- I can remember when Negroes were just going around as Ralph has said, so often, scratching where they didn't itch, and laughing when they were not tickled. But that day is all over. We mean business now, and we are determined to gain our rightful place in God's world.

And that's all this whole thing is about. We aren't engaged in any negative protest and in any negative arguments with anybody. We are saying



that we are determined to be men. We are determined to be people. We are saying -- We are saying that we are God's children. And that we are God's children, we don't have to live like we are forced to live.

Now, what does all of this mean in this great period of history? It means that we've got to stay together. We've got to stay together and maintain unity. You know, whenever Pharaoh wanted to prolong the period of slavery in Egypt, he had a favorite, favorite formula for doing it. What was that? He kept the slaves fighting among themselves. But whenever the slaves get together, something happens in Pharaoh's court, and he cannot hold the slaves in slavery. When the slaves get together, that's the beginning of getting out of slavery. Now let us maintain unity.

Secondly, let us keep the issues where they are. The issue is injustice. The issue is the refusal of Memphis to be fair and honest in its dealings with its public servants, who happen to be sanitation workers. Now, we've got to keep attention on that. That's always the problem with a little violence. You know what happened the other day, and the press dealt only with the window-breaking. I read the articles. They very seldom got around to mentioning the fact that one thousand, three hundred sanitation workers are on strike, and that Memphis is not being fair to them, and that Mayor Loeb is in dire need of a doctor. They didn't get around to that.

Now we're going to march again, and we've got to march again, in order to put the issue where it is supposed to be -- and force everybody to see that there are thirteen hundred of God's children here suffering, sometimes going hungry, going through dark and dreary nights wondering how this thing is going to come out. That's the issue. And we've got to say to the nation: We know how it's coming out. For when people get caught up with that which is right and they are willing to sacrifice for it, there is no stopping point short of victory.

We aren't going to let any mace stop us. We are masters in our nonviolent movement in disarming police forces; they don't know what to do. I've seen them so often. I remember in Birmingham, Alabama, when we were in that majestic struggle there, we would move out of the 16th Street Baptist Church day after day; by the hundreds we would move out. And Bull Connor would tell them to send the dogs forth, and they did come; but we just went before the dogs singing, "Ain't gonna let nobody turn me around."

Bull Connor next would say, "Turn the fire hoses on." And as I said to you the other night, Bull Connor didn't know history. He knew a kind of physics that somehow didn't relate to the transphysics that we knew about. And that was the fact that there was a certain kind of fire that no water could put out. And we went before the fire hoses; we had known water. If we were Baptist or some other denominations, we had been immersed. If we were Methodist, and some others, we had been sprinkled, but we knew water. That couldn't stop us.

And we just went on before the dogs and we would look at them; and we'd go on before the water hoses and we would look at it, and we'd just go on singing "Over my head I see freedom in the air." And then we would be thrown in the paddy wagons, and sometimes we were stacked in there like sardines in a can. And they would throw us in, and old Bull would say, "Take 'em off," and they did; and we would just go in the paddy wagon singing, "We Shall Overcome." And every now and then we'd get in jail, and we'd see the jailers looking through the windows being moved by our prayers, and being moved by our words and our songs. And there was a power there which Bull Connor couldn't adjust to; and so we ended up transforming Bull into a steer, and we won our struggle in Birmingham. Now we've got to go on in Memphis just like that. I call upon you to be with us when we go out Monday.

Now about injunctions: We have an injunction and we're going into court tomorrow morning to fight this illegal, unconstitutional injunction. All we say to America is, "Be true to what you said on paper." If I lived in China or even Russia, or any totalitarian country, maybe I could understand some of these illegal injunctions. Maybe I could understand the denial of certain basic First Amendment privileges, because they hadn't committed themselves to that over there. But somewhere I read of the freedom of assembly. Somewhere I read of the freedom of speech. Somewhere I read of the freedom of press. Somewhere I read that the greatness of America is the right to protest for right.1 And so just as I say, we aren't going to let dogs or water hoses turn us around, we aren't going to let any injunction turn us around. We are going on.

We need all of you. And you know what's beautiful to me is to see all of these ministers of the Gospel. It's a marvelous picture. Who is it that is supposed to articulate the longings and aspirations of the people more than the preacher? Somehow the preacher must have a kind of fire shut up in his bones. And whenever injustice is around he tell it. Somehow the preacher must be an Amos, and saith, "When God speaks who can but prophesy?" Again with Amos, "Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream." Somehow the preacher must say with Jesus, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me," and he's anointed me to deal with the problems of the poor."

And I want to commend the preachers, under the leadership of these noble men: James Lawson, one who has been in this struggle for many years; he's been to jail for struggling; he's been kicked out of Vanderbilt University for this struggle, but he's still going on, fighting for the rights of his people. Reverend Ralph Jackson, Billy Kiles; I could just go right on down the list, but time will not permit. But I want to thank all of them. And I want you to thank them, because so often, preachers aren't concerned about anything but themselves. And I'm always happy to see a relevant ministry.

It's all right to talk about "long white robes over yonder," in all of its symbolism. But ultimately people want some suits and dresses and shoes to wear down here! It's all right to talk about "streets flowing with milk and honey," but God has commanded us to be concerned about the slums down here, and his children who can't eat three square meals a day. It's all right to talk about the new Jerusalem, but one day, God's preacher must talk about the new New York, the new Atlanta, the new Philadelphia, the new Los Angeles, the new Memphis, Tennessee. This is what we have to do.

Now the other thing we'll have to do is this: Always anchor our external direct action with the power of economic withdrawal. Now, we are poor people. Individually, we are poor when you compare us with white society in America. We are poor. Never stop and forget that collectively -- that means all of us together -- collectively we are richer than all the nations in the world, with the exception of nine. Did you ever think about that? After you leave the United States, Soviet Russia, Great Britain, West Germany, France, and I

could name the others, the American Negro collectively is richer than most nations of the world. We have an annual income of more than thirty billion dollars a year, which is more than all of the exports of the United States, and more than the national budget of Canada. Did you know that? That's power right there, if we know how to pool it.

We don't have to argue with anybody. We don't have to curse and go around acting bad with our words. We don't need any bricks and bottles. We don't need any Molotov cocktails. We just need to go around to these stores, and to these massive industries in our country, and say,

Bread. And what is the other bread company, Jesse? Tell them not to buy Hart's bread. As Jesse Jackson has said, up to now, only the garbage men have been feeling pain; now we must kind of redistribute the pain. We are choosing these companies because they haven't been fair in their hiring policies; and we are choosing them because they can begin the process of saying they are going to support the needs and the rights of these men who are on strike. And then they can move on town -- downtown and tell Mayor Loeb to do what is right.

But not only that, we've got to strengthen black institutions. I call

want to have an "insurance-in."

Now these are some practical things that we can do. We begin the process of building a greater economic base. And at the same time, we are putting pressure where it really hurts. I ask you to follow through here.

Now, let me say as I move to my conclusion that we've got to give ourselves to this struggle until the end. Nothing would be more tragic than to stop at this point in Memphis. We've got to see it through. And when we have our march, you need to be there. If it means leaving work, if it means leaving school -- be there. Be concerned about your brother. You may

and placed it on a dangerous curve between Jerusalem and Jericho. And he talked about a certain man, who fell among thieves. You remember that a Levite and a priest passed by on the other side. They didn't stop to help him. And finally a man of another race came by. He got down from his beast, decided not to be compassionate by proxy. But he got down with him, administered first aid, and helped the man in need. Jesus ended up saying, this was the good man, this was the great man, because he had the capacity to project the "I" into the "thou," and to be concerned about his brother.

Now you know, we use our imagi-

fire shut up in his bones

"God sent us by here, to say to you that you're not treating his children right. And we've come by here to ask you to make the first item on your agenda fair treatment, where God's children are concerned. Now, if you are not prepared to do that, we do have an agenda that we must follow. And our agenda calls for withdrawing economic support from you."

And so, as a result of this, we are asking you tonight, to go out and tell your neighbors not to buy Coca-Cola in Memphis. Go by and tell them not to buy Sealtest milk. Tell them not to buy -- what is the other bread? -- Wonder

upon you to take your money out of the banks downtown and deposit your money in Tri-State Bank. We want a "bank-in" movement in Memphis. Go by the savings and loan association. I'm not asking you something that we don't do ourselves at SCLC. Judge Hooks and others will tell you that we have an account here in the savings and loan association from the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. We are telling you to follow what we are doing. Put your money there. You have six or seven black insurance companies here in the city of Memphis. Take out your insurance there. We

not be on strike. But either we go up together, or we go down together.

Let us develop a kind of dangerous unselfishness. One day a man came to Jesus, and he wanted to raise some questions about some vital matters of life. At points he wanted to trick Jesus, and show him that he knew a little more than Jesus knew and throw him off base....

Now that question could have easily ended up in a philosophical and theological debate. But Jesus immediately pulled that question from mid-air,

nation a great deal to try to determine why the priest and the Levite didn't stop. At times we say they were busy going to a church meeting, an ecclesiastical gathering, and they had to get on down to Jerusalem so they wouldn't be late for their meeting. At other times we would speculate that there was a religious law that "One who was engaged in religious ceremonials was not to touch a human body twenty-four hours before the ceremony." And every now and then we begin to wonder whether maybe they were not going down to Jerusalem -- or down to Jericho, rather to organize a

"Jericho Road Improvement Association." That's a possibility. Maybe they felt that it was better to deal with the problem from the causal root, rather than to get bogged down with an individual effect.

But I'm going to tell you what my imagination tells me. It's possible that those men were afraid. You see, the Jericho road is a dangerous road. I remember when Mrs. King and I were first in Jerusalem. We rented a car and drove from Jerusalem down to Jericho. And as soon as we got on that road, I said to my wife, "I can see why Jesus used this as the setting for his parable." It's a winding, meandering road. It's really conducive for ambushing. You start out in Jerusalem, which is about 1200 miles -- or rather 1200 feet above sea level. And by the time you get down to Jericho, fifteen or twenty minutes later, you're about 2200 feet below sea level. That's a dangerous road. In the days of Jesus it came to be known as the "Bloody Pass." And you know, it's possible that the priest and the Levite looked over that man on the ground and wondered if the robbers were still around. Or it's possible that they felt that the man on the ground was merely faking. And he was acting like he had been robbed and hurt, in order to seize them over there, lure them there for quick and easy seizure. And so the first question that the priest asked -- the first question that the Levite asked was, "If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?" But then the Good Samaritan came by. And he reversed the question: "If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?"

That's the question before you tonight. Not, "If I stop to help the sanitation workers, what will happen to my job. Not, "If I stop to help the sanitation workers what will happen to all of the hours that I usually spend in my office every day and every week as a pastor?" The question is not, "If I stop to help this man in need, what will happen to me?" The question is, "If I do not stop to help the sanitation workers, what will happen to them?" That's the question.

Let us rise up tonight with a greater readiness. Let us stand with a greater determination. And let us move on in these powerful days, these days of challenge to make America what it ought to be. We have an opportunity to make America a better nation. And I want to thank God, once more, for allowing me to be here with you.

You know, several years ago, I was in New York City autographing the first book that I had written. And while sitting there autographing books, a demented black woman came up. The only question I heard from her was, "Are you Martin Luther King?" And I was looking down writing, and I said, "Yes." And the next minute I felt something beating on my chest. Before I knew it I had been stabbed by this demented woman. I was rushed to Harlem Hospital. It was a dark Saturday afternoon. And that blade had gone through, and the X-rays revealed that the tip of the blade was on the edge of my aorta, the main artery. And once that's punctured, your drowned in your own blood -- that's the end of you.

It came out in the New York Times the next morning, that if I had merely sneezed, I would have died. Well, about four days later, they allowed me, after the operation, after my chest had been opened, and the blade had been taken out, to move around in the wheel chair in the hospital. They allowed me to read some of the mail that came in, and from all over the states and the world, kind letters came in. I read a few, but one of them I will never forget. I had received one from the President and the Vice-President. I've forgotten what those telegrams said. I'd received a visit and a letter from the Governor of New York, but I've forgotten what that letter said. But there was another letter that came from a little girl, a young girl who was a student at the White Plains High School. And I looked at that letter, and I'll never forget it. It said simply,

"Dear Dr. King,

I am a ninth-grade student at the White Plains High School."

And she said,

"While it should not matter, I would like to mention that I'm a white girl. I read in the paper of your misfortune, and of your suffering. And I read that if you had sneezed, you would have died. And I'm simply writing you to say that I'm so happy that you didn't sneeze."

And I want to say tonight -- I want to say tonight that I too am happy that I didn't sneeze. Because if I had sneezed, I wouldn't have been around here in 1960, when students all over the South started sitting-in at lunch counters. And I knew that as they were sitting in, they were really standing up for the best in the American dream, and taking the whole nation back to those great wells of democracy which were dug deep by the Founding Fathers in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution.

If I had sneezed, I wouldn't have been around here in 1961, when we decided to take a ride for freedom and ended segregation in inter-state travel.

If I had sneezed, I wouldn't have been around here in 1962, when Negroes in Albany, Georgia, decided to straighten their backs up. And whenever men and women straighten their backs up, they are going somewhere, because a man can't ride your back unless it is bent.

If I had sneezed -- If I had sneezed I wouldn't have been here in 1963, when the black people of Birmingham, Alabama, aroused the conscience of this nation, and brought into being the Civil Rights Bill.

If I had sneezed, I wouldn't have had a chance later that year, in August, to try to tell America about a dream that I had had.

If I had sneezed, I wouldn't have been down in Selma, Alabama, to see the great Movement there.

If I had sneezed, I wouldn't have been in Memphis to see a community rally around those brothers and sisters who are suffering.

I'm so happy that I didn't sneeze.

And they were telling me --. Now, it doesn't matter, now. It really doesn't matter what happens now. I left Atlanta this morning, and as we got started on the plane, there were six of us. The pilot said over the public address system, "We are sorry for the

delay, but we have Dr. Martin Luther King on the plane. And to be sure that all of the bags were checked, and to be sure that nothing would be wrong with on the plane, we had to check out everything carefully. And we've had the plane protected and guarded all night."

And then I got into Memphis. And some began to say the threats, or talk about the threats that were out. What would happen to me from some of our sick white brothers?

Well, I don't know what will happen now. We've got some difficult days ahead. But it really doesn't matter with me now, because I've been to the mountaintop.

And I don't mind.

Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the promised land!

And so I'm happy, tonight.

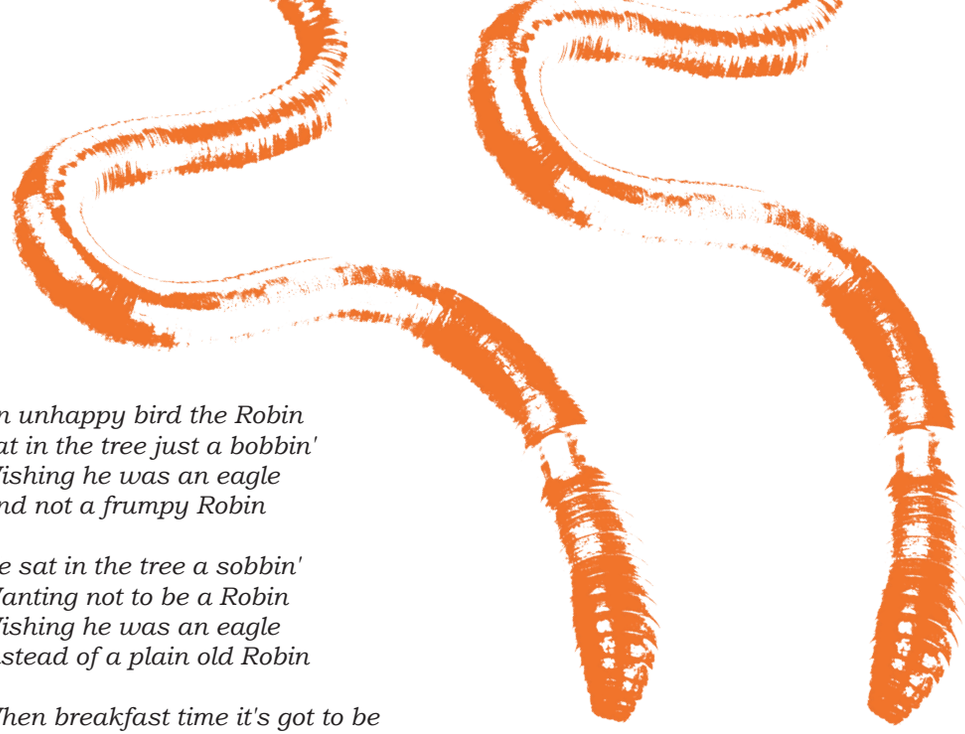
I'm not worried about anything.

I'm not fearing any man!

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord!!


Robin

Robin
Bruce Holverson



An unhappy bird the Robin
Sat in the tree just a bobbin'
Wishing he was an eagle
And not a frumpy Robin

He sat in the tree a sobbin'
Wanting not to be a Robin
Wishing he was an eagle
Instead of a plain old Robin

When breakfast time it's got to be
He flew to the ground from the tree
And he thought that no eagle
Could find a worm like he

I'm back, said the robin in the tree
I thought about my degree
That I wished to be an eagle
I want to stay me

This is the only poem I wrote.
Wrote one day sitting on the porch
watching a Robin.
Dedicated it to Sandra

Letters to a Young Poet

Letters to a Young Poet
Paris February 17, 1903
Rainer Maria Rilke

Dear Sir,

Your letter arrived just a few days ago. I want to thank you for the great confidence you have placed in me. That is all I can do. I cannot discuss your verses; for any attempt at criticism would be foreign to me. Nothing touches a work of art so little as words of criticism: they always result in more or less fortunate misunderstandings. Things aren't all so tangible and sayable as people would usually have us believe; most experiences are unsayable, they happen in a space that no word has ever entered, and more unsayable than all other things are works of art, those mysterious existences, whose life endures beside our own small, transitory life.

With this note as a preface, may I just tell you that your verses have no style of their own, although they do have silent and hidden beginnings of something personal. I feel this most clearly in the last poem, "My Soul." There, something of your own is trying to become word and melody. And in the lovely poem "To Leopardi" a kind of kinship with that great, solitary figure does perhaps appear. Nevertheless, the poems are not yet anything in themselves, not yet anything independent, even the last one and the one to Leopardi.

Your kind letter, which accompanied them, managed to make clear to me various faults that I felt in reading your verses, though I am not able to name them specifically. You ask whether your verses are any good. You ask me. You have asked others before this. You send them to magazines. You compare them with other poems, and you are upset when certain editors reject your work. Now (since you have said you want my advice) I beg you to stop doing that sort

of thing. You are looking outside, and that is what you should most avoid right now.

No one can advise or help you — no one. There is only one thing you should do. Go into yourself. Find out the reason that commands you to write; see whether it has spread its roots into the very depths of your heart; confess to yourself whether you would have to die if you were forbidden to write. This most of all: ask yourself in the most silent hour of your night: must I write? Dig into yourself for a deep answer. And if this answer rings out in assent, if you meet this solemn question with a strong, simple "I must," then build your life in accordance with this necessity; your whole life, even into its humblest and most indifferent hour, must become a sign and witness to this impulse.

Then come close to Nature. Then, as if no one had ever tried before, try to say what you see and feel and love and lose. Don't write love poems; avoid those forms that are too facile and ordinary: they are the hardest to work with, and it takes great, fully ripened power to create something individual where good, even glorious, traditions exist in abundance. So rescue yourself from these general themes and write about what your everyday life offers you; describe your sorrows and desires, the thoughts that pass through your mind and your belief in some kind of beauty — describe all these with heartfelt, silent, humble sincerity and, when you express yourself, use the Things around you, the images from your dreams, and the objects that you remember.

If your everyday life seems poor, don't blame it; blame yourself; admit to yourself that you are not enough of a poet to call forth its riches; because for the creator there is no poverty and no poor, indifferent place. And even if you found yourself in some prison, whose walls let in none of the world's sounds — wouldn't you still have your childhood, that jewel beyond all price, that treasure house of memories? Turn your attentions to it. Try to raise up the sunken feelings of this enormous past; your personality will grow stronger, your solitude will expand and become a place where you can live in the twilight, where the noise of other people passes by, far in the distance.

And if out of this turning-within, out of this immersion in your own world, poems come, then you will not think of asking anyone whether they are good or not. Nor will you try to interest magazines in these works: for you will see them as your dear natural possession, a piece of your life, a voice from it. A work of art is good if it has arisen out of necessity. That is the only way one can judge it.

So, dear Sir, I can't give you any advice but this: to go into yourself and see how deep the place is from which your life flows; at its source, you will find the answer to the question of whether you must create. Accept that answer, just as it is given to you, without trying to interpret it. Perhaps you will discover that you are called to be an artist. Then take the destiny upon yourself, and bear it, its burden and its greatness, without ever asking what reward might come from outside. For the creator must be a world for himself and must find everything in himself and in Nature, to whom his whole life is devoted.

But after this descent into yourself and into your solitude, perhaps you will have to renounce becoming a poet (if, as I have said, one feels one could live without writing, then one shouldn't

write at all). Nevertheless, even then, this self-searching that I ask of you will not have been for nothing. Your life will still find its own paths from there, and that they may be good, rich, and wide is what I wish for you, more than I can say.

What else can I tell you? It seems to me that everything has its proper emphasis; and finally, I want to add just one more bit of advice: to keep growing, silently and earnestly, through your whole development; you couldn't disturb it any more violently than by looking outside and waiting for outside answers to questions that only your innermost feeling, in your quietest hour, can perhaps answer.

It was a pleasure for me to find in your letter the name of Professor Horacek; I have great reverence for that kind, learned man, and a gratitude that has lasted through the years. Will you please tell him how I feel; it is very good of him to still think of me, and I appreciate it. The poems that you entrusted me with I am sending back to you. And I thank you once more for your questions and sincere trust, of which, by answering as honestly as I can, I have tried to make myself a little worthier than I, as a stranger, really am.

Yours very truly,
W

The X-Factor

The X-Factor
By Sheila Quealey

"If there is a magic in story writing, and I am convinced there is, no one has ever been able to reduce it to a recipe that can be passed from one person to another."

— John Steinbeck

I go for a walk and then a drive in an attempt to clear my head and open a pathway to the missing word, the elusive one that is on the tip of my tongue, at the edge of my consciousness, the one that I cannot go forward in my story without. It is the word that will convey what I need it to, the only word. It needs to describe quietness but not silence, peace in the outdoors. I go to the shelf and lift the thesaurus, Roget's, a gift as an undergraduate. I begin the search and two hours later I find myself having made a substantial detour through many pages, roaming from word to word. I come upon tenebrose and I love the sound of it so much I jot it down in my writing journal. Two lines above it is tendril, and I see in my mind's eye, a wisp of hair on a hot day, the delicate tie of a creeping plant. Unsure if tendril is the right word for the tie on a creeping plant, I leave the book and go to the Internet and search. I find that I am correct but I also meet the words bine, (which twine their stems around a support) and vine (which use tendrils, suckers and other methods) and I love that I have learned the difference. All the while tenebrose, rolls around my mind like a marble until it settles in a corner waiting for the day when I will need it.

Later, Arcadian, the word that I was looking for hours ago comes to me. As I put the thesaurus back on the shelf a clipping from an old New Yorker falls to the floor. It is a poem by Eamon Grennan, entitled A Few

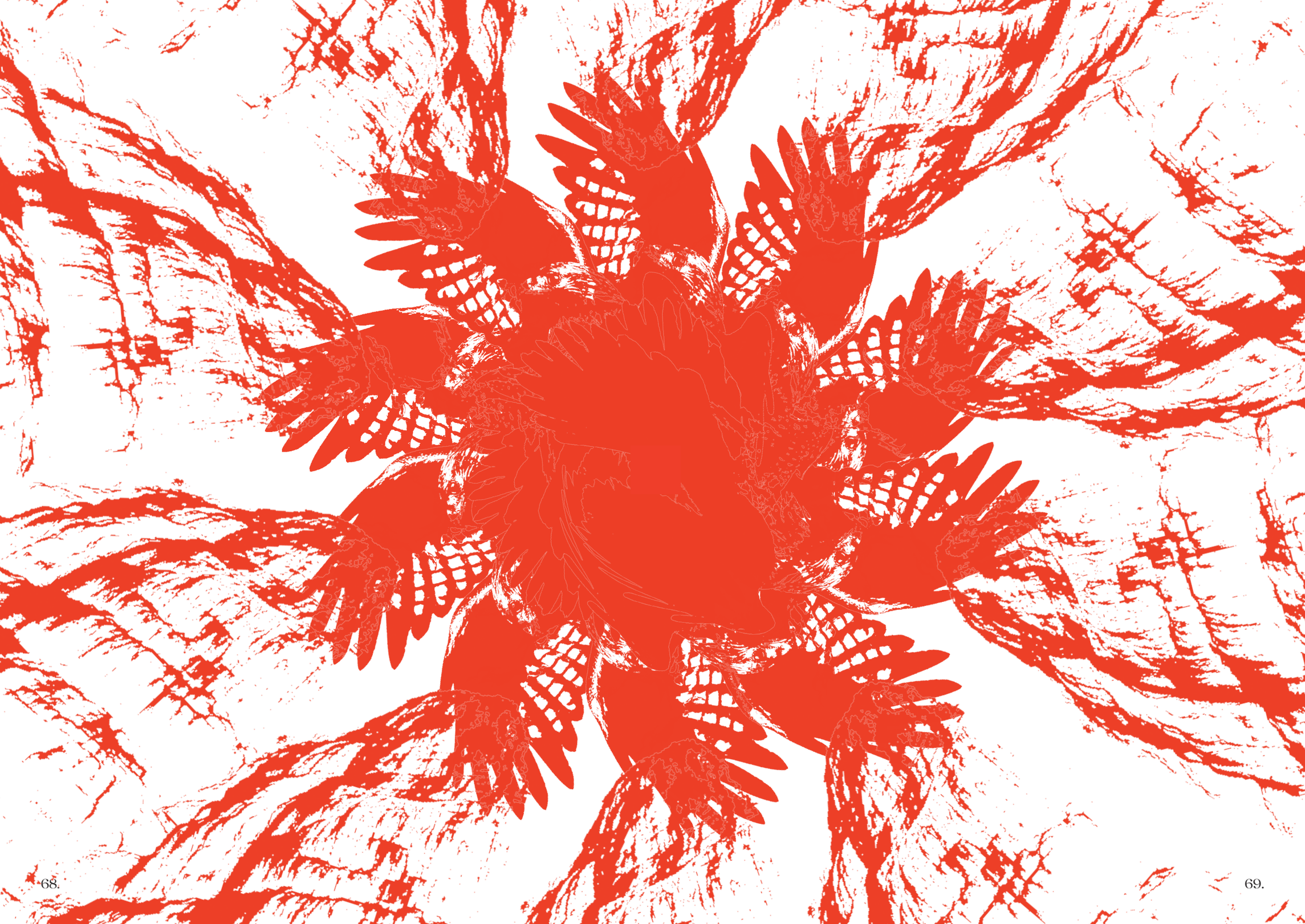
Facts. I sit down in my reading chair and try to remember when and why I choose to keep this poem. I read it and phrases strike me like a bell, Cremona daisies, a cairn of bulky logs, the cats dazzled and I am filled with awe and admiration but with a particular kind of joy too. I am afraid to look at the clock knowing that hours and hours have passed and I have an assignment due.

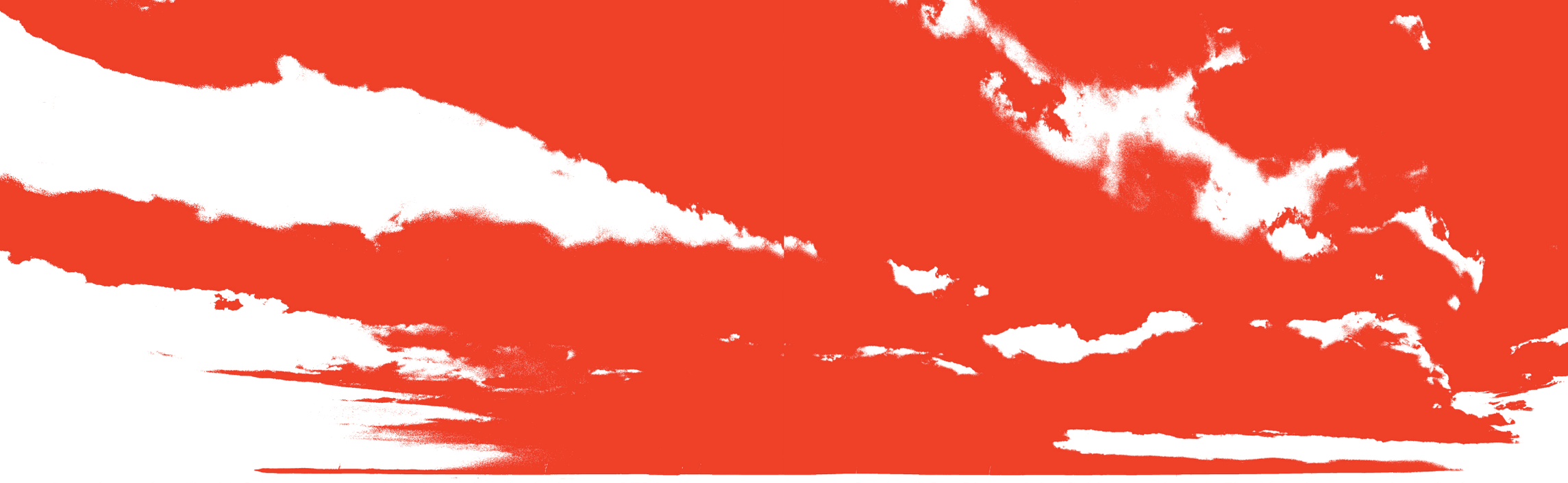
"There are no new ideas. There are only new ways of making them felt," Audre Lorde once said. The study of narratology confirms this. For generations, scholars have been formulating structures to analyse the elements that make up a story using ancient myths as a basis to prove what Lorde and so many others now know: all the stories in the world have already been told. As a creative writing teacher and a student on an MA in Creative Writing course this should concern me. If all the stories have already been told then why have I chosen the path of a writer? Is being a logophile enough?

It is difficult to explain why a single word or metaphor can evoke such wonderment in a reader and why that is so difficult to achieve as a writer. During my research, I have spent a good deal of time studying the theories of Aristotle, Saussaure, Propp, Lévi-Strauss, Cambell and Barthes. I have enjoyed learning about the evolution of the taxonomy of Structuralism, Semiotics, and Linguistics. I formulated a nice, neat chronological history of narratology, but the more I read the more I realize that while these categories and templates, like Campbell's frequently used Hero's Journey, are useful to the writer they are not what makes a great writer. But what is the secret? Or is there, as Steinbeck suggests, magic to telling a story? As a reader, I know the ingredients. Every recipe is different of course but all require the very careful measure of language. Pushed to explain eloquently the feeling a well-written story evokes in me, I find myself unable to do so.

Are writers skilled or talented? In his book Outliers, author Malcolm Gladwell says that it takes roughly ten thousand hours of practice to achieve mastery in a field; his research found that talent had little to do with accomplishment (although the "practitioners" do tend to fall in love with their practise transforming it from a chore to a passion). If this is true than anyone willing to put in the time can become a successful anything. Can this apply to writing?

Like my Roget detour earlier, I leave the theorists and turned to Google. I search the words "beauty" and "talent" and "skill" to get a broader response. I come across a TED talk featuring the singer, Sting. His talk is about his struggle with writer's block. He jokes that his Faustian pact may have expired and he finds himself without inspiration. An artist who has been so prolific in the past finds himself unable to write a single song. Sting's story for TED was crafted. There was a definite structure: a beginning, middle and an end. He used the extended metaphor of a shipyard, and he weaves his newly inspired songs through, adding depth and emotion to the overall presentation. It is a moving experience for the audience (me) and much of this is because of the skill of his storytelling. But Sting, who has been writing songs for over thirty years has surely exceeded Gladwell's "10,000 – Hour – Rule" threshold. Yet, despite his long and successful career, he hits a creative wall and finds himself mute for years. Why doesn't a





formula work to fix this?

Richard Seymour, a product designer, asks in his TED talk, "How Beauty Feels…", if we think beauty or if we feel it. He tells a story about an eighteenth-century watchmaker who engraved words on the backside of the balance wheel. When asked why he would do this, when nobody would ever see the words, the old man replied, "God will see it." Seymour had a physiological response to this story. He says, "Beauty is in the limbic system of the beholder," the system where we feel before our brain can manipulate us into contextualizing. This response was involuntary, not because he is a religious man, because he isn't, but because the beauty of the act moved him. Seymour organises his response to beauty into three categories: poignancy, a triggering of a big emotional response, (which can be happy or sad); pathos, an appeal to our emotions; and triumph, a feeling of transcendence. He experiences these feeling when he looks at a MV Augusta motorbike. I feel this when I read this passage from Donal Ryan's story Tommy and Moon,

"The hawk flew in one summer evening wet with blood, full of shotgun pellets, and died. It had come back to him to see could he save it again, and he couldn't, and his breath went from him, and his reason for a time, and the world tilted a bit and never fully righted."

This deceptively simple, brief excerpt causes my breath to catch in my throat. In these few short sentences, Ryan manages to create an absolute connection between the reader and this fictional character. It creates, for me, all the feelings that Seymour talks about in relation to beauty. Each time I read this I hurt with empathy for Tommy.

Worried that I am going off track, I return to academia and to the philosopher, Edmund Burke, who, in his book A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful, distinguishes between the beautiful and the sublime. Beauty, Burke says, is something that moves us, something that is "small, smooth, attractive and delicate." The sublime is vast, gloomy, dark and threatening. This would suggest that there is no pleasure in the sublime but Burke argues the opposite. He says that the sublime has the ability to affect us on a visceral level. He says there is a delightful terror in standing at the precipice of a mountain or witnessing a storm. This delight comes from the sheer power of the sublime experience and the exhilaration that brings with it. Burke also refers to the sublimity of words. The incredible awe the perfect combination can create, "This idea or this affection caused by a word, which nothing but a word could annex to the others, raises a great degree of the sublime; and this sublime is raised yet higher by what follows, a 'universe of death.'"

The idea that a word can be beautiful, terrible or ugly is an odd concept – how does one measure this? The beauty of a single word is quite subjective but this passage from Toni Morrison's Beloved, meets Burkes requirement of the sublime for me. The litany incurs the weight of its meaning and beauty even in its ultimate tragedy:

"A shudder ran through Paul D. A bone-cold spasm that made him clutch his knees. He didn't know if it was bad whiskey, nights in the cellar, a pig fever, iron bits, smiling roosters, fired feet, laughing dead men, hissing grass, rain, apple blossoms, neck jewellery, Judy in the slaughterhouse, Halle, in the butter, ghost-white stairs, chokecherry trees, cameo pins, aspens, Pauls A'S face, sausage or the loss of a red, red heart."

I can't resist including Roland Barthes theory of pleasure. In his book, The Pleasure of the Text, he compares the experience of reading a good book to a sexual orgasm. He makes a dis-

God will see it.

tinction between plaisir (pleasure) and jouissance (bliss). For him, the text and the reader are partners. He demands that the author write something that "must prove to me that it desires me…" This is quite an edict; how do you provide "jouissance" for a reader?

The Paris Review archives house pages and pages of interviews with established, professional, and successful writers discussing their process. Faulkner advises, "Let the writer take up surgery or bricklaying if he is interested in technique. There is no mechanical way to get the writing done, no shortcut. The young writer would be a fool to follow a theory." While Hemingway says it is all about, "Getting the words right. Sometimes, there's no other way to put it. When we're writing, we can analyse everything and apply every skill and trick and device that we know. We know how to write, and how to edit, and what should work and what shouldn't. But sometimes we just can't get the words right, and we have to keep working at them until the do, whenever that may be."

Does any of this help me to write a story? Do the definitions and classifications, the structures and elements, the advice and the warnings serve to improve my writing? I look around my study where I have sat for hours on end trying to figure out the secret, the X-Factor, to writing the perfect story, to becoming a great (or even good) writer. The spines of the books that fill my shelves, floor to ceiling stare back at me: James Joyce, Claire Keegan, Joseph Conrad, Sara Baume, F. Scot Fitzgerald, Edith Wharton. I can chose anyone of them and apply the theory of narratology to an analysis of their contents. Or I can pick one that catches my eye, one that I haven't read for twenty years maybe, or one that I bought just yesterday and lose myself in the intangible something that these writers possess while I continue my apprenticeship at the words of the masters and hope that the story will come.