

2007

American Fiction

Sean Casey

University of Massachusetts Amherst

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.umass.edu/theses>

Casey, Sean, "American Fiction" (2007). *Masters Theses 1911 - February 2014*. 4.
Retrieved from <https://scholarworks.umass.edu/theses/4>

This thesis is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst. It has been accepted for inclusion in Masters Theses 1911 - February 2014 by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst. For more information, please contact scholarworks@library.umass.edu.

AMERICAN FICTION

A Thesis Presented

by

Sean Casey

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
MASTER OF FINE ARTS
May 2007
MFA Program for Poets & Writers

© Copyright by Sean Casey 2007

All Rights Reserved

AMERICAN FICTION

A Thesis Presented

by

SEAN CASEY

Approved as to style and content by:

Chris Bachelder, Chair

Sabina Murray, Member

Noy Holland, Member

Dara Wier, Director
M.F.A. Program for Poets and Writers

Joseph Bartolomeo, Chair
Department of English

CONTENTS

	Page
THE FIRST CHAPTER.....	1
OUR NATION’S GREATEST LOVEMAKER.....	20
SPEECH BY FATHER PAUL SHANLEY TO THE PSYCHOLOGICAL PANEL AT THE BOSTON/BOISE COMMITTEE CONFERENCE ON “LEGAL, PSYCHOLOGICAL, AND ETHICAL ISSUES OF INTERGENERATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS,” COMMUNITY CHURCH, BOSTON, DECEMBER 2, 1978.....	41
LETTERS TO A YOUNG MISOGYNIST	50
THE PRIVATE SECTOR.....	130

THE FIRST CHAPTER

Months before my birth my parents fucked each other. Before I learned this I never thought my life resulted from anything. I was created but untouched by creation. I was an uncaused cause.

When I found out fucking was involved, that I was like everyone else, and that it was Pierce and Pop who did it, I filled with joy and curiosity. Reveling in their intimacy gave me pleasure. Their act lowered me to the ground, taught me I'm no different. Despite what remarkable things separate me from you—the many thousand ritual deaths, for starters—I'm standard issue *Homo sapiens* and that's all right with me. I'm a man whose toenails, when clipped, smell of the same bouquet as anyone else's. The world said, "Hey man, smell this." What relief I found in that scent!

My life is public knowledge. But until recently, even I was ignorant of a certain very important period of my life: conception, pregnancy, and birth. Now I had questions. Had I known that answers would only arouse more questions, and lead me to write the first chapter of my autobiography, I'd have preferred ignorance. There are much more pleasurable activities than writing an autobiography. I can list several: hunting, praying, my wife, and genital stimulation. And no doubt there are more pleasurable activities than reading my autobiography.

But curiosity is violent. It gracelessly sucks one of will and replaces it with its seductive potion. Curiosity convinces you that it is your will, and need be followed at all cost. So badly I wished to see myself in my parents' eyes, forced from socket by force of lust. So badly I longed to find myself in the folds of their lovemaking, to hear my voice harmonize with Pierce's thick, locomotive puffs and Pop's industrial pant, his incorrigible, nasal whinny. So strong did my curiosity grow that answers consented to my inquiry. When they did I wept along with the little baby version of myself to whom I now had access. You, reader, follow me because you too are curious, and have no choice.

Andover

So I'm not going to talk much about what Dad, or Pop, or Poppy (nickname), did at Andover in terms of academic and athletic achievement. I'm going to content myself, and you will content yourselves, with those details that bear relevance to me. I say this not out of arrogance but out of laziness: other books document what Dad did in class, how well he played for Coach Declemente, and they do it fairly well. But there are huge omissions from these books. Where, pray tell, are the in-depth descriptions of my father's developing genitals? Is the world to assume my dad is without genitals and their attendant appetites? Not anymore it's not.

But OK, briefly: Poppy was president of nearly everything at Andover. His leadership was contagious. Walking in his proximity was itself an extracurricular activity. All who passed Poppy smelled better, thought sharper, and grew lighter of complexion. His was a perfection that, by virtue of its excess, purged itself from his body. Physically, his bod smoked; tempting male vapors simmered out from pores, enveloping all in his proximity. Did Poppy have girlfriends? Ahem, *chicks stood in line to butter his rack, reader.*

When it came to women, it was never a matter of their attraction to Pop—that much was a built-in appetite of all women, even the most arid. It was a matter of his selection. Consequently, Pop's task in selecting a woman was a daunting one. Poppy's would be a woman of unprecedented physique, transcendent patience, sturdy resolve, and intelligence of no match to his own. She would be of profound stock. Her virtues would fail description. Her greatness would be captured only in a creative art like chamber music, rough fucking, or ritual death.

At the family gathering of '41, details of Pop's marriage and my birth were foretold before the family totem. This totem told the entirety of family history, from the first to crawl out of water up to Pop. Carved up and around it, ancestors engaged in their adventures, triumphs, and demises.

As it did each year, family crowded the totem. Aunt Bea pointed to the illustration of her husband's father. There he was, entombed in the struggle that ended him—the struggle of the toddler.

“Ugh, Unnnhhh!” She grunted, pointing to the figure of the man gored at the end of a toy spear. “Uhhhh!”

Cousin Ruth shivered. Tears enlarged her eyes fourfold. She watched in the totem her mother's final moments. The rock lodged in her mother's gullet took her away once again. Her mother pounded at her belly in the hopes of dislodging the rock from her into the beyond.

At the top of the totem was a block of uncarved wood, and above that the sky. The next chapter would be etched into that block; I would go there. What would come after me would be carved into the sky, into *it*. I would be in charge of that.

The single men of the family, those yet to produce offspring, circled the totem nude. The women of the family blew on their ears and the small of their backs. Dad's appendage, wrapped in leaf sheath, was first to rise to the challenge. It was decided: Poppy would marry and multiply.

With Poppy chosen, grandfather Walker sent scouts across the country. The scouts scoured yearbooks, local press, the wall prose of male Johns. Who they found were put through intense family scrutiny. The list of finalists was sent to Poppy.

Before Poppy left for war in 1942, he decided on a girl. (Note: Upon Poppy's selection, Walker's forty eight scouts were summarily gutted.) A sixteen year old from Rye, NY, Barbara Pierce had all the right parts: hair, anywhere manifest, was intoxicatingly soft and incapable of wrongdoing; breasts, two in number but manifold in possibility, had character and an honorable ratio of sass to natureliness. Her upper torso made Poppy alternately growl with reproductive gusto and swoon through light fits of sleep. Barbara Pierce also had legs, feet, and most of a face. While her mouth was incongruous and a lantern jaw hung beneath, teeth checked out across the board. She mawed all manner of hard fruit and frozen meat into submission in seconds. She was, by the way, a night grinder, and her dentist had provided a leather harness and mouthguard as sleepwear to keep what teeth she had in her possession. Her gums weren't firm and had been prescribed a toughening regimen, but Poppy could overlook that. Her leadership skills and overall relevance did not remotely match his, but Pierce showed the ability to bolster Pop in the few places that needed it.

This was, of course, the impression Dad got of Pierce from the scouting reports. He had yet to examine her contours and cavities, let alone meet her at the luncheonette. Poppy wasn't even at the getting-to-know-Barbara-Pierce stage yet. She hadn't sold Pop; there remained work to be done.

Poppy readied a special force of men, fellow students and teachers from Andover, all good patriots prevented from serving their country in war

by some bodily woe, men for whom Pop had immense respect. One, an English teacher, Wm. Quincy, light and old but soldered tightly at the hinges, was still very capable of extracting pleasure from life and women. Another was the poor savant Joseph, a Jew squeezed of any social sense by elderly parents, his brain squeezed into the humorous rhombus that was his head. The head held his brain in awful discomfort, and certainly prevented thoughts from proper circulation. He never shaved a hair from his face, which looked like deflated basketball with a lot of hair on it. To help Quincy and Joseph were three blacks and Poppy's closest pal: the inimitable Hugh 'Poops' Wilson.

The squad met in a basement room of Samuel Phillips Hall. Poppy gave them their orders as well as life-sized, inflatable body maps of Barbara Pierce. The weak were prescribed an afternoon lifting workout, but all underwent intense cardiovascular training. Each morning at 6:30, the squad carried its dummies to the snow covered lacrosse fields. Barbaras were arranged in parallel, dummy heads pointing in the compass direction of Rye, New York. All stripped nude, including Poppy, and under his direction engaged and traversed their Barbaras. Tactical and strategic approaches to spelunking Pierce were variously and vigorously employed. Extra points were awarded those who most accurately approximated Pop's dexterous humping. At 7:45 each morning the squad finished on cue. Giddy yelps of

pleasure skipped across the shiny, ice encrusted fields like tiny ponies. The whinnying rattled the windows of nearby dormitories.

After the dummies, surrogate Barbaras, women with identical statistics and emotional pitch, were practiced on.

It would be egregious of me to omit the consensus among these men that they owed their bedroom prowess to Poppy. But Pop's selfless love for them prevented him from accepting their thanks. Each of the men Pop chose were men he would die for. And soon Poppy would know the opposite to be true, too.

When Poppy left for war, surrogate Poppies left for Barbara Pierce. What considerable feats Dad accomplished in those theaters among the clouds paled to the feats of heroism and selflessness deployed by his surrogate suitors on Pierce.

The surrogates traveled to New York and made the considerable acquaintance of Pop's prospect. From 1942-1944 they conducted operations on, in, around, and with Barbara. They tested Barbara for emotional density, took note of locations of indecision and pliability as well as patches of steadfastness. If she consented to intimacy, they took full advantage of her offerings and rooted out as much pleasure as possible, forgoing their own jollies at all cost.

In 1945, Poppy returned from the war and called his surrogates back to Andover. They met at the dining commons, each with notes, statistics, and stool sample. The latter served no romantic purpose, but Pop gingerly buried Pierce's stools in pots of sand under a row of heat lamps. With time, they would harden and turn white. In future years he would carve each into a topographical map of a country he had absolutely no interest in visiting. Today, Pierce's stool atlas sits prominently in a cupboard in our family's Kennebunkport home.

The surrogates' job was done. After a light meal, Dad instructed the squad to strip, hung them from ceiling fixtures, and surgically drained them of semen. Their seed was collected in jars labeled with their names. When the men were empty, Pop buried the jars out on the Main Quadrangle. On top, the men and Pierce' pleasure stats were burned in a neat stack; ashes scattered wherever the wind cared to scatter them. One resolute corpse, probably that of Poops Wilson, burned but refused to follow the wind.

Into the ashes Pop dropped a seed; the tree, still young by tree standards, stands to this day.

Following the plumb and burn, Pop traveled to NY and began courting Pierce.

Courtship began immediately on his arrival. This was not remarkable. Do you have to tell certain winged foul to migrate in a certain direction come

a certain season? No, and you did not have to tell a woman the whereabouts of Poppy, that he was in town, or that she had to immediately find him, take his arm, consume dinner with him, and, in time, yield up what he desired in terms of intimacy.

A few months into the courtship, the couple took a trip to Maine. This would be the first time they touched each other's genitals. They were out to dinner. Under the table Dad just plain old went for it. Mom grabbed him by the wrist and pushed a fork through his right forearm, effectively pinning it to his left, inner thigh. In pain and concomitant anger, he grabbed her by the hair and threw an elbow combination: first at her left breast, then mouth. The couple spilled atop their table. Restaurant customers let it happen, continued normal, relaxed dining. Dad got Mom in an armlock submission hold. She didn't call uncle; he snapped her elbow. Mom made no sound. Dad appreciated her stoicism as well as the break in action. Her arm stuck from her like a branch from a snowman. But with the knife of the hand on her good arm, Mom chopped at the base of Dad's penis—dislocating it from its berth, stationing it on his stomach such that a sunny day's erection would make a sundial of his belly—and stuffed a roll in his mouth to muffle the scream.

After dinner, Mom and Dad treated their wounds at the nearby hospital and moved to get married.

The Wedding

There were so many animals at my parents wedding. It took place on January 6, 1945, on a small island off the coast of Maine. Representatives from each of the world's countries—and where countries were absent, factions, tribes, whatever—were summoned. Zebras, koala bears, giraffes, dogs, ducks, bugs, fish, and pretty much every other animal sent an emissary. For the ceremony, the animals had their own pen to congregate in. Typically animals don't know how to behave in church, but these did. There was very little inappropriate behavior. In fact, the only attendees to eat one another, defecate, exhibit display behavior, or openly mate were relatives. The animals placidly sat and observed the proceedings, except for those that never really sit, such as sea lions, which were provided a transparent tub.

Following the standard wedding service, the world's human representatives filed out from the church and were led to the beach. Animals and my family surrounded them. Each representative was given his very own shovel and instruction to dig a hole. Finished, they lay in their holes with their shovels and waited patiently as kid cousins ran along the beach to fatally stab them with javelins. Once all were stabbed, sand was kicked over them, and javelins thrown out to greet the tide.

The reception began. A great feast was had. Tables, chairs, and food were treated in the loosest sense of the word, the dance floor a mass of livestock, zoo animals, and relatives. It went all night. By dawn, the tide had

uncovered many dignitaries. Arms stuck up from the surf and waved goodbye, carried off forever on a morning swim. Some stayed, beached. In weeks following the wedding, after the sea cleansed bones of flesh, the family had a little fun. Children threw remains about. Cousins used tendons to rig a passable volleyball net. Badminton equipment, too.

Every few years another dignitary surfaces from the sand. I suspect this will be the case indefinitely.

Directly after the reception, in the early evening of January 7th, Poppy and Pierce commenced the intercourse which would produce me.

An Evening of Relevant Intercourse

While Pierce was taught by her mother to lie back as if clinging for dear life to the underside of a cliff—curling toes and grasping at the air with every ounce of strength—Poppy had been taught by family, teachers, coaches, and peers never to approach anything conventionally, and to bring the entirety of his learning and talent to the task at hand. So when Barbara let Poppy lead her out to the beach, she had no idea as they stepped around half buried diplomats what Poppy had in store.

What Pierce discovered was an austere pleasure sanctum on an outcropping from the coast. A military tent stood buffeted by wind. Inside, candles struggling to stay lit stood on rocks, many of which were covered with cushions custom designed for lovemaking. Circling the tent were

hundreds of smaller candles, long since cinched out by the wind. A sheep smelling of gasoline lurked nearby and looked frightened.

Poppy didn't so much take off his wife's clothes as burn them off without harming all that much on her body. She, in turn, took his clothes off in the conventional fashion.

Let it be said by me, lest anyone doubt it: my parents did not kiss that night. Before the act, they wrapped their heads in gauze, leaving no mouth exposure, and only the smallest of slits across their eyes. Both put on mittens and booties for warmth and traction, and belts at their abdominals for increased engorgement. To signal the beginning of intercourse, Dad fired a flare. Fifty miles away, the execution of fifty at-risk youths, by manners unknown, was carried out. Hundreds of miles off shore, thousands of small origami boats, deployed by the Coast Guard, began their slow trip into port.

Inside Pierce, Poppy got emotional. Pierce had seen many men, but this was Poppy's first woman. As their conjoined bodies rocked uneasily on the towel and cushion-covered boulder, my father had to take refuge in trivia to keep from finishing early. He went through state capitals and could not remember North Dakota's. The uncertainty gave him endurance.

The tent kept them partially from the elements, and mostly from the binoculars of curious relations. Poppy was afforded a view of the water; Barbara one of the sky. They made sounds, for certain, but the wind and waves drowned out everything except the piercing whistle which

accompanied plumes of smoke exiting my father's rear. He was working that hard.

They fucked for seven hours. Few details remain of the lovemaking with the exception of Pop's 700 page treatise on Mom's vulva. A lot of it is unreadable and full of tacky typographical crap—descriptions of her folds using parentheses, for instance. There were patches of elegance, though:

Would that my writing were as welcoming as this, my entrance, my son's exit. Would that the world knew my pleasure—wait, no! What did I just write? No one but I will know such pleasure. My anger will meet my offspring for abusing this supple hallway I forever travel without ever passing through.

At the act's conclusion, Poppy felt two sharp heels against his back. Beneath him Pierce grew stiff. He looked up. Paper boats began to swarm the harbor. The sheep, now reeking, mewed. Pierce cackled, then began pounding Poppy in the face. In his own defense he let forth his seed and secured his lineage, pinning her to the earth in a historical sense.

He yelled, "I...you...die!" Family ensconced in the nearby brush commenced the slaughter of 1200 orphans. Throughout his climax Poppy held Pierce firmly in place.

Upon recovering his poise, Pop dragged Pierce to shore. He hung her by her ankles from an oak for two days to make sure his seed had sufficient time to work.

Reflecting on his hanging, fertilizing wife, Dad realized he had some higher education to finish.

Yale

Dad at Yale did many things in a perfect manner. My readers, I could elaborate on his perfection, clobber you with it, amplify your insignificance, reduce you to nothing but others' memories of you. Or I could make you weep all over your bodies, redirect tears from the ducts behind your eyes so they pour from your shins and foreheads. I will do neither. Rather, I will concentrate on one act Poppy perfected and by touching that, touch all things. (Don't let your impatience grow strong, reader: we're reaching the point of my birth. Soon I will take center stage, my parents will diminish, and biographers will take over.)

Here's what Pop did at Yale: he got his hands on the female orgasm. He took it and made it his.

She was a shy and homely Shannon. She didn't even know she had it and would, of course, have never used it. The one man she had intimate contact with was uninterested in eliciting it from her, and what man would blame him? She was unexceptional, gum drop in shape, and not long for

anything. The best thing Pop could do—which was, of course, the *only* thing he could do—was include her in *his* glory, which was what he did. Did she say thank you? No, but that’s presumably because she died before she got the words out. Even though death does ply poor Shannon from our story soon, she remains for Pop, Pierce, me, and even you, readers, a source of joy and a lesson on potential.

To pull the female orgasm out of Shannon, Pop recruited pals from the crew team. First, they belted her to the ground. The coxswain, a shifty Jew named Reuben, sat on her face. Tall and burly oarsman positioned themselves on her port and starboard and gave her their all. Reuben expertly directed the rowers in their affection. He kept them on course. Several yards away, Dad stood in a grounded rowboat with a megaphone.

“Give it here, Shannon!” he yelled, impatiently. “Give it up!”

When it came, orgasm extraction sounded like an impossibly large, football-stadium-sized toilet becoming unclogged. The orgasm left Shannon as a purple orb, seven feet in diameter. It hummed, traveled confidently through the air, and settled itself on Poppy who, rather than soften and femalize, grew steeled in his masculinity. A layer of new muscle coated him. His already generous Popsicle extended, in flaccidity, an inch and a half. He became reflective in an affirming sense: were a passerby of dismal self esteem to look into Pop, he would see his full potential and walk away, confidently, into his future. Pop himself *grew in number*, becoming Pops. An army of sated

Poppies stood in formation on the Yale green. Peels of laughter shot from their mouths. Dad laughed not with the world, not at the world, not with Shannon, but at Shannon.

“Shannon, this is top drawer, this—! I can’t believe you, you, you—”

As Poppy replicated and Pops laughed, all ethnics within a 100 yard kill radius of Pop—I showed my hand by calling it a kill radius, didn’t I?—died. But I’m not entirely correct in saying they died. It’s more accurate to say they stopped working and hence stopped mattering. Of course, all this means is that six or so brown janitors paused in their normal cleaning routines to pass away, go home in the absolute sense, and leave not only corpses but what would rapidly become filthy buildings in their absence. These buildings have not been cleaned since the deaths of these janitors to commemorate Poppy’s female orgasm of 1944.

Shannon, too, died. Dad, being Christian, felt inappropriate laughing at her, but inappropriate *in a way that gave him genital pleasure*. He grew aroused to an extent beyond imagining, and certainly beyond the confines of his own trousers, which he breached. In addition to the most cruel of laughter, he cried in joy. The orgasm riding his body prevented propriety. Poppy left her where she fell and phoned campus police. The officer he spoke to later reported how powerful gusts of Poppy’s laughter left the receiver and knocked him to the ground.

Every year, on the day of Shannon's sacrifice, Poppy visits Shannon's grave and, after procuring an erection, laughs, trying to give back to her a little of what he took. It doesn't work, of course, but in doing so Pop feels better about himself.

In and Out of Barbara Pierce

I was born when I exited my mother's privates—her “poetry,” as Poppy put it—but I was alive before that. Sure, I was alive in her womb, but I'd like to think that my story is slowly convincing you that *I've always been here*, even if the facts are not in my favor.

Mom's pregnancy began in 1945. She was 19. In only a few weeks I became sentient. My first conscious moments were fearful: I became suspicious that the world wanted me dead. My suspicions were confirmed when sharp, metal objects jabbed at me. I dodged them.

'Nice try, Barbara,' I thought.

I got a lot of thinking done inside Pierce. It's natural, isn't it, for one's life to flash before one at both poles of life? The old man, looking back on what memories he still has access to, and the little fetus, taking in a world he has no words to describe but will soon enough.

I like to think that pregnancy and childbirth are more a battle than a mutually affirming act. The big battle came on July 6, 1946. Pierce walked across a street; I made my first escape attempt, hard. It threw her off-balance

and caused her to fall, hit her chin on the curb. She was out, there was blood, etc. Me – 1, Pierce – 0.

I gave her a chance to come to and get stitches before giving birth another go. I attempted a reversal: I exited the womb from the top and pushed aside what organs I found until I breached the stomach. I jerryrigged peristalsis for my own needs and began an ascent up the gullet. Pierce went from complaining about a mean burp to gagging for everything she was worth. When my fingers reached out into this world and grabbed her bottom lip, she guessed my game. She bit down, swallowed. She wrung her own neck, pinched and rolled her body like a tube of toothpaste. Pierce wasn't playing around.

I didn't feel bad about losing the battle—she had a few years on me. She was a principled woman; on the matter of my entering this world through her poetry, she would not equivocate.

So, reluctantly, I left her by the route she desired. But I couldn't let her victory go unspoiled. I exited with such force that a reverse bodyquake sent flesh waves up her stomach and down her legs. In photos for seven years following, she blurred from the waist down.

Here's a fact for you, reader: When I exited my mother, I was not the age I should have been. It was as if I began aging not at conception, but beforehand. When I came out, I was two years old, spoke fluent English, and

had excellent, post-toddler motor skills. Explain *that*. Was it really *fucking* that caused me, or something else? Something *beyond* fucking?

Outside Pierce, my hands were cold. I reached back in to stay warm. Hands in, I looked into her eyes, then turned and looked into Pop's eyes. Then I surprised everyone by splitting vision: one eye looked at Pop, the other at Pierce. Pop and Pierce followed suit, and in this way we gazed into each other all at once, smiling, grateful to be alive and together.

Around now, reader, you might ask my name. That would be reasonable. But were I to tell you, and were you to repeat, it wouldn't be pretty. It would be as if your nasal cavity detonated. As if you vomited a shotgun shell. As if a grenade of five centimeter's kill radius went off under your tongue. It would kill, is what I'm saying. Don't you want to stay alive, reader, roped to your chair, a fetus in a foreign womb?

OUR NATION'S GREATEST LOVEMAKER

Le Duc called him his intern. Close to seven feet tall, he was shy as a toddler and made frequent attempts to reduce himself by slouching, ducking and hiding. Working against any inconspicuousness was not only height but a right leg which exceeded the left in length. His walk made his height fluctuate, and looked more like a labored climbing across the ground. And while he dressed in a camouflage of khakis and button downs, these had been purchased before his full height was reached, and extremities shot out from their openings. Sitting atop all of him were all seeing eyes, big like those of a sea beast, which followed the world with equal parts care and oblivion.

He was somewhere in his 40s. Some speculated that he studied Le Duc to overcome shyness, others that he was Le Duc's simple brother and tagged along ever since the governor cut funding for day programs. But those few who troubled themselves to interact with him attested to a full intelligence. Managing such an audience was almost impossible, though. Le Duc might have actively sought interactions, but his intern actively hid in bushes.

On the morning of July 11th, 2005, per his custom, the intern waited outside Le Duc's apartment. After several minutes the door opened and Le Duc emerged, his face warm with pride. The wrinkles around his eyes may have showed age's success over him, but the eyes themselves held the story of a recent victory, and his smile displayed ample amounts of gum, bright in

color, which, making a retreat into his head, enlarged already prominent teeth. His intern, reading these signs, showed his excitement by straightening his posture and standing on his toes.

“Some people, Intern,” Le Duc began, closing the door, “ask me what I do. But I don't tell them I work at a copy shop. No. I tell them I love.”

On the stairs down to the street, Le Duc took the lead.

“As with history's great lovers, I come from modest stock. Everyone in my family found employment in a trade. My brother's a plumber. My sister's a framer. My father made furniture. I make love.”

Outside, Le Duc began his trademark stride—the walk that led some to joke that teeth were the only bones in his body. But the intern was not behind him. He was stopped before Le Duc's mailbox, staring, as he did every morning, at the name he found there: GARY HOUGH. Gary Hough! Many a friend of Le Duc had been forced to find a hard-to-reach obscenity to articulate their surprise at learning this name. In the intern's estimation, the name's ordinariness was tantamount to an act of violence, similar to learning the ordinary name of a brutal dictator. Liberia's Charles Taylor, for instance. Isn't he your dentist? A sneaker? The intern had a point. Few names were less elegant than *Gary*, and the deeply flatulent *Hough* did not help anything.

Coming to, the intern ran in his incongruous stride to catch up with Le Duc, who hadn't known he was gone.

“...and that’s because love’s a rare trade, man. You don’t apprentice yourself. They’re no classes at vocational high schools. I would know this—I went to a vocational high school. All the education’s inside you. To learn to love you tap potential you have inside. And I tip my hat to contraception. Thanks to contraception, mine is a trade that goes without a product. Imagine, intern—a trade without a product! Instead, love’s left a process. A process without end, only means. My goal is to be forever engaged in the process of love. Every morning, I awake to love. Chess—”

Le Duc’s abrupt stop trips his intern, who fall to the curb.

From the ground, he looks up to find Le Duc staring into the window of a clothing boutique.

“One minute, Intern. Let me browse the merchandise.”

Browsing the merchandise, for Le Duc, was a two-fold act. At once, he looked through the window to ogle employees and into the window to examine his reflection. The routine greatly impressed his intern for its physiological impossibility—by all laws, one cannot pay attention to two places. The clerk looked confused. Le Duc looked pleased, and turned away.

“They’re always women working in there, Intern. Even the men”

The pair continued toward the café Le Duc frequented.

“Last night, chess was my conceit. The bar became my chess board.

Those at the bar were of two camps: those who would help me trap the queen, and those who wouldn’t. In the former group I counted males

engaging in display behavior; in the latter, the more sinister male flirts, and women who I've previously known."

Le Duc held open the door to the café. His intern tried to pass but Le Duc blocked him so that two women, each pushing middle age hard, could enter. Le Duc bowed and smiled to both before following them inside. His intern followed him.

"I approach the queen slowly. Old styles of chess crowd the board's center, the area surrounding the bar, with pawns. The new style's elliptical, edging in from the periphery, casing the joint before going in for royalty. I use both. My approach depends on timing and crowd intoxication. It's perfect that chess is oriented towards the king. By the time I'm close enough and his majesty's royally scared for his own safety, I take up with the queen. I buy her a drink, and soon we both walk off the board."

Le Duc coordinated this last phrase with his payment for a Grande Americano. His hand met the cashier's in what became a sensual handshake. While he addressed his intern, standing with coffee-jacket and sugar packet ready, he also spoke to the cashier, a soured female twentysomething. The intern leaned over the counter to watch: the technique was breathtaking. The woman was left simultaneously offended and enchanted.

Leaving, Le Duc made clear he was not going to indulge any curiosity about what followed the "elegant series of combinations" that persuaded last night's queen into bed.

“No, intern. I will attend to a neglected portion of the lovemaking. Words would only turn our love into biology. I will begin, rather, with the morning after, as I awoke alongside my queen.

“Dig this, intern. I heard the chirping of birds. They fell into the bedroom, like snowflakes in summertime. My partner lay afloat in my bed’s harbor. What waves there were in my sheets were frozen about her. She slept atop them with the contentment of a lady otter who, moments before, had sated her hunger by shoving a smelt in her mouth.

“At the stereo I stirred to life an LP of Karnatak music. I began the movements. My lover, opening her eyes, was warmly greeted. I swayed before her like a sea anemone to light and multiple currents. To her, I may have seemed to disregard the rhythm of this music, and took this as explanation for her face’s terror. But, on further study of my swaying—if, mind you, she had the curiosity to undertake such study—she would have found in my dance a cycle, visiting every so often the rhythms of this classical Indian music. Every several bars I was with the beat for a measure, and then fled from it.

“Alas, I was too subtle for her! Intern, it’s the curse of those gifted in the pleasurable arts to have such extraordinary rhythm. She interrupted me without any concern for rhythm.

“‘Are you—?’ she started, but said nothing further. I left the unfinished question unanswered for a spell, before finishing it for her.

“‘Making love?’ I proposed. ‘I am. *Astute* of you to notice.’

“She made a few sounds, Intern, but not enough for a recognizable word.

“‘Making love,’ I repeated. ‘To you.’

“I was. It was all lovemaking. Love began long before I met this young woman at 9:30 the night before, and would end long after we parted, for good, in a half hour. (It only begins to taper now, in fact, as a new lover, as yet unknown to me, tiptoes onto radar.) The word which eventually emerged from her mouth was singular, and hard-fought.

“ ‘*You!*’

“I said, ‘Enough about me. What’s *your* name?’

“I continued to dance. She relented to the strong currents of my bedding. For a time she was submerged. But when she surfaced again, she was fully awake. Her eyes contained that appreciation for life only realized after life’s nearly lost.

“My dear intern, the queen began to shriek.”

At Original Copy, Le Duc prepped machines.

“This day job is an avocation. I come here to take images and make duplicates. I try damn hard to leave work with as much of myself as I bring. I strive for self preservation. Work has a nasty habit of making an inferior duplicate of its employees. When I leave, for instance, I smell of toner. I am

prone to repetitions in behavior. I am not the man I was that morning. To fight this tendency, to keep my original self in tact, I commit small protestations by day. By night, of course....”

Le Duc displayed his teeth. His intern nodded. He sat on the edge of a chair by the back exit. He looked like delivery man who had just arrived, and was just about to leave.

“Do you think I would make a good teacher, Intern? I would be controversial. I hold that lovemaking’s the ideal way to educate. It’s nothing the Greeks didn’t understand. Only after shared intimacy can one teach. Simple. All barriers between parties are gone. The pupil, open, is pure receptivity.

“Of course, this was not my lot this morning. My lover was not a committed student. I told her, ‘Love, properly made, is an affirmation of the individual in a work of sweet cooperation. We are not two nameless strangers passing on the street. We are survivors on the same life raft; we each preserve the other by our unique presence. We are each a safe shore for the other; we are *there* for each other. Dig it, Cindy.’

“I could tell, from the resulting facial expression, she was not a Cindy. She continued to make that awful noise. As though she were a radio at top volume, and her dial was quickly turned. She obviously lacked the diction to articulate what she felt: true, unadulterated individuality.”

A grim man walked by. This man, who Le Duc called Manning Richard, was branch manager, and the shop's most committed employee. While he was there for long hours, physically, Richard was never fully present. In shop terms, he existed in a grayscale. Not quite there, smudged over life's surfaces, he seemed frustrated that he was still around. While Le Duc did not look up from his work, his intern did, fearfully following him as a manatee might a motor boat.

Richard turned up the radio volume such that, with the photocopiers' accompaniment, Le Duc's storytelling was drowned in a frothy ballad. Le Duc persevered, his expression indicating delight that his boss wished to bring the morning to a boil. He shouted.

"Intern, Despite her intense ambivalence, I was *there* for Cindy! Unlike, say, this song on the radio—a song whose sentiments, entirely universal, impoverished listeners consider, somehow, special, speaking only to them!"

"Hough!"

It was Manning.

With a look of coy surprise, Le Duc stopped work and walked over to Manning's office. The office wasn't truly an office, but an attempt at one. The intern, having turned down the radio, joined them. He positioned himself three quarters of the way inside a nearby supply closet.

"Yes, Manning Richard?" Le Duc asked.

According to the placard on his desk, Le Duc's supervisor was not named Manning Richard, but Richard Manning. Steamed, he sat, and held a magnifying glass over a business report. He handed it to Le Duc.

"A customer of yours returned these."

Le Duc took barely a glance and tossed it back.

"Ernst and Young."

"And this?" he pointed to a corner, shoving the report back.

Manning had asked a loathsome question. Le Duc knew the answer and Manning knew he knew and asked it anyway. Le Duc sighed, and looked through Manning's magnifying glass at a page's top left corner. There, a miniature horse reared back on hind legs.

"Manning Richard, despite your considerable difficulty figuring the appropriate staple to puncture 85 pound cardstock, I'm not going to believe you don't know what this is. I won't—I can't do it."

Manning remained silent.

"Fine. It's a gelding."

Manning scoffed through his nostrils.

"Which is a castrated horse. Which is a symbol, Manning Richard, in certain indigenous cultures, of caution."

"Let me put it another way, Hough—"

“You’d better do that, Manning. This meeting has surpassed my threshold for tedium and offends my work ethic. You, my supervisor, have interrupted the Gleason job to talk horses?”

“How’s this, Gary—thirty seconds to explain why you should keep your job.”

Le Duc smiled, looked about, and repositioned himself in his chair, steeling himself for an imminent ducal *coup de grace*. The intern, in anticipation, moved from being three quarters in the supply closet to being two thirds of the way in the supply closet.

“In what might *also* be called a half minute, Manning Richard, I don’t know if I can justify my continued employment here at your franchise of Original Copy. But I can tell you that that gelding was not on the original that the temp delivered. That gelding’s my gelding. It’s on the top left hand corner of every page that leaves here from my hands. I put it there so that each duplicate has some small life as an original, and so that those observant enough, like you, can find it, and then find themselves by meditating on it.”

Well past anger now, Manning treaded speechlessly in a new emotion. He got up, and left by the back exit.

“Stay strong,” Le Duc said, following him out. “I’m here for you, tiger.”

Back inside, Le Duc whispered to his intern, "Manning Richard has just been delivered to the next level!"

The next level, in ducal psychology, was a place beyond normative emotional and cognitive functioning where Le Duc endeavored to take those he especially favored or disliked.

His coworkers approached in curiosity. All received the same cryptic answer: "Manning Richard has left to contemplate the gelding."

Then Le Duc batted away the preceding minutes as he might a bad scent, and returned to his previous project.

"So I ask her, 'It's Candace, right?' I still can't make out a word in her response but can, from the seismic facial twitch, conclude I do not speak with a Candace. So I say, 'No matter, Candace. Candace or no Candace. The world has a million Candaces. We're after something more than a name. Who *are* you...Candace?'

"Sometimes, when we confront our true selves, we don't like what we find. Our experience of *being* is so intense, we are so fully *there*, we *are* too much for ourselves. Candace was taken up in an experience of unadulterated Candace. She was in what St. John of the Cross called the Bright Morning of the Soul. Into romance we all travel; the bright morning is when we discover romance' mortality, and confront the fact that we are always solitary creatures, even if we are, for a time, attached to others.

“‘Candace,’ I said. ‘Our affair.... It may take years, but you’ll realize that last night, what we did, what we made—it never began, and it will never end.

“And you should have seen her, Intern. The poor girl’s shivering was audible, and the air was only cool. It was as if she were a baby bird in a shell, and breaking out of herself.”

Manning Richard returned with the closest he could come to a security guard. James was Manning’s cousin and, judging from his getup, had been interrupted in a set of squats.

“That one,” Manning said. “And the tall guy with him.”

The intern retreated to the closest restroom. James grabbed Le Duc by the elbow and shoved him outside. Given the quality in the timbre of the Bach he whistled, its fair to say Le Duc felt little about the departure. Meanwhile, the intern sounded a low, muffled weeping. When James opened the closet door, he bolted past him and out the back exit.

Outside, the intern brushed Le Duc off, and looked to see if anyone had witnessed the ouster. With the gestures of a conductor, Le Duc finished the Goldberg Variation he had begun.

“Then, Intern, I gently took her arm and led her to the window. I identified all birds by genus. I interpreted, for Cindy, their calls congratulating us on our lovemaking.”

The intern, shocked by the story's seamless continuation, stopped weeping.

"Then, I made my special sound—which, fittingly, frightened Candace—and the birds flew off. Only the empty tree remained.

"'Candace,' I said, 'birds make home where they land. When circumstances demand, they take flight, and take home with them. Home is right here'—I gestured to the floor—'and home is everywhere.' I threw my hand out from the window. 'Be a bird for me,' I said. I opened the door to the apartment and directed her attention to the welcome mat. 'Welcome home, Candace.'

It took more than a compassionate shove to break Candace from attachment's inertia, but I managed it without seeming the rogue. Once she was moved, her speed rapidly increased. Soon she was in full sprint, and accompanied her running exit with a call not unlike that of a diving bird of prey. I grew scared, honestly. But proud, too.

"I realized Candace's movement was doubly resonant. Yes, she was a bird of prey dive bombing the world for vermin, but she was also a baby bird nudged from a nest for the first time. That long plummet to earth—my gosh! Necessary, life threatening, sublime! And then, and then—the hawk snags the field mouse, baby bird takes to her first clumsy flight. Candace, in doing both, thrilled me. I watched her diminish into the distance, but grow in stature and

confidence. Intern, a woman sprinting down Walnut Ave in her underpants had never been so breathtaking!

“I began to weep in joy. I knew that, wherever Candace ran, she would never truly leave me, and nor would I ever leave her. No, she would never truly run from me. She would never reach the *there* she ran toward. But, eventually, someday, she will realize that there never is a *there* to run to in the first place, and be the wiser for it. I will go now to visit Mother.”

After a moment’s confusion by the sudden pivot in Le Duc’s speech, the intern nodded eagerly. He had never met Le Duc’s mother. He had, in fact, never known such a mother existed.

At the bakery, a teenage girl waited behind a counter. Le Duc ordered, and his intern, curious how his teacher would interact with the girl, stood at such proximity that he got in the way of the transaction. Le Duc nudged him back.

The teen handed Le Duc a white bag.

“Guess what, Jackie,” Le Duc said. Her name was, according to the placard on her apron, not Jackie.

“What?”

“I just got fired.”

“No!”

Le Duc looked into the bag.

“Are the waffle cookies in here?”

“What are you going to do now?”

“Huh?”

“What are you going to do?”

“Visit my Mom.”

“No, for work.”

Le Duc rolled up the bag, then grabbed and pulled his intern to him.

“See this guy, Jackie?”

The intern attempted to escape. Le Duc held tight.

“This is big fella’s my intern. That job at the copy shop might’ve paid bills, but this guy’s my real project. I’m training him to take over for me for when I *really* retire. What do you think, Jackie—think he’s up to it?”

The intern, embarrassed by the complement, successfully extracted himself, but, in turning away, tripped. Jackie, while not gripped physically by Le Duc, was nonetheless in the grips of a confusion he had created.

* * *

“There, Intern,” Le Duc points. “Formerly housing projects, now an old folks home.”

The introduction to his mother’s residence was too concise, and the intern looked at him suspiciously. The usual Le Duc would have compared

the structure to, say, a Spanish church converted to a mosque. The elderly inching along its grounds would have become statues of saints, a woman in a wheelchair would be a gargoyle loose from a turret.

And then, another surprise. For the first time that day, Le Duc located his intern's eyes.

"Mom's still here, still all there," he said. "But she went through a turbo senility. She shot through a second childhood into a new maturity."

Inside, as they neared his mother's wing, nursing home employees walked at a noticeably slower clip. Le Duc approached the nurse's station and handed over the bag of pastries. The nurses, using only body language, expressed gratitude.

A door to the left of the desk had two name placards. One read: MARY HOUGH. Noting this, the intern whispered a soft obscenity. Le Duc opened the door. Neither entered. A strong silence spilled out from the room. Inside, two women sat. One was obviously Le Duc's mother. But not because of the shared bone structure. It was the fact one couldn't possibly call her Mary Hough.

Mrs. Hough little noticed their entry, but her roommate, a younger disabled woman roughly Le Duc's age, welcomed them from her locked wheelchair with a sustained vowel. While no man, Mrs. Hough ignored what was feminine about her. What womanliness Le Duc had he obviously took from her. Her eyes, unworried by what wrinkles dove in around her son's, lit

her face sufficiently to make the rest of her features ignorant of age. And while her roommate wore a dress from another period, Mrs. Hough's outfit, presumably purchased by her son, was hip and hard to date. She moved only her head, and with it inspected her cell with wonder, as if for the first time and exclusive witness to its splendor.

They entered.

"Ma—why'd you refuse physical therapy?"

The words broke Mrs. Hough's spell on the intern, who snapped to attention and put his head through the ceiling paneling. Neither that noise nor the question made an impact on Mrs. Hough, though. A long half minute passed. Then Mrs. Hough smiled. It wasn't, it appeared, in response to Le Duc or his intern's breach of the ceiling (and subsequent clumsy extraction of his head), but rather independent of cause. It was impossible to judge just how long her smile lasted. It was exquisite in execution, and enlarged the moment.

"Physical therapy's a really good idea."

The smile left. Despite the room's two inhabitants and two visitors, it felt unpeopled—felt, suddenly, as small as it, in fact, was. A television in the corner announced itself, at low volume. Static snapped from the screen.

Without warning, Mrs. Hough swung her legs bedside and pushed herself to a confident stand. Instead of rushing to steady her, Le Duc quickly assumed a low crouch. Mrs. Hough followed. The intern lowered his brow,

and his lips began a wiggling. Mother and son began to tiptoe around the perimeter of a shared, undrawn circle. An alarm clock radio came on; a nimble harpsichord melody entered the room. With each step, the Houghs moved cautiously into new floor tiles, poised for action. Mrs. Hough initiated, throwing a quick punch and elbow combination that Le Duc parried. Le Duc kicked; Mrs. Hough ducked. Le Duc came back with a low kick. This time Mary jumped, but did not return to the floor. She hung in midair. The intern, sobbing, ran to the bathroom. Several pigeons flew into the room's window. From her wheelchair, the roommate applauded. Le Duc watched his mother without surprise. From the bathroom, his intern peaked, then shut the door.

“Cut it out, Ma.”

Mrs. Hough landed. Whatever it was, it resumed. Le Duc slid diagonally across the floor. Mrs. Hough leapt the room, then dropped to the ground and rolled toward her son. Le Duc jumped over her, and she continued into the end table, breaking its four legs. A candy dish crashed on the floor.

In all, it lasted an indeterminate expanse of time. One minute, one hour, maybe more, maybe both. Mrs. Hough ended it. She straightened as much as she was able and held out her arms. Mother and son embraced.

Then Mrs. Hough did something terribly low. Le Duc fell.

Leaving her son, groaning, Mrs. Hough opened the bathroom door and addressed her son's hyperventilating intern, crouched inside.

“Grab a leg, guy.”

Shaking, the intern emerged from the bathroom, picked up one of Gary Hough’s ankles and, together with his mother, dragged him from the room.

“I’ve heard so much about you,” Mrs. Hough said to the intern.

“Gary’s always singing your praises.”

While the intern was in no shape to respond, it was clear that, given a few months to recover from what he just saw, he would be flattered by the comment. In the hall, a nurse stood by with an ice pack and a wheelchair. Mrs. Hough patted the intern on the back.

“You two come by more often.”

* * *

As his intern wheeled him out of the elevator onto the ground floor, Le Duc returned to his generous commentary.

“While all elderly are more or less slow moving, you’ll notice more activity buzzes around them down here, as opposed to those in Mom’s wing—where, while this is not entirely complimentary, I regard each person as a work of sculpture, even if, since they live, they’re works in progress. They are arranged in exhibition, and the head nurse’ their curator. Here, though, we see mankind’s terminal terrarium, habitat lite. These folks are

safely sealed from the tame wilds of a real world which would finish them in minutes.”

In the foyer, with a few winces, Le Duc stood, and promptly got on the phone. It was dark outside. It was an odd sensation, the intern noted, as if they were leaving a foreign airport after a long flight.

Le Duc began walking toward his apartment.

“After you visit Mom,” he said, “come by and take a look at it.”

Pocketing the phone, he turned to his intern.

“Intern, your shift’s over. My attentions will soon be stolen by banalities. Drew’s coming by to fix a faucet.”

Their normal schedule ran until six. It was barely five.

“Good. I’ll see you tomorrow. Morning, same time as usual. We’ll job hunt.”

Maybe Le Duc noted a clouding of his intern’s face, or how he had not stopped hyperventilating since the nursing home.

“You know, Intern, you’re doing a wonderful job.”

The intern paused in his ventilations, and then began again.

“That’s right. I notice changes for the better each day. Soon you’ll be a duke yourself, and I won’t be of assistance. In fact, we’ll be colleagues. I’ll have to affect a distaste for you because we’ll be in competition!”

Despite the soreness, Le Duc managed to reestablish his usual stride. Several strides further he turned back.

“No—not a duke. Why would you want to be another man’s copy? No, you will be the same you. You will have battled your potential, and won. And—”

The intern lifted his head in anticipation. A storefront window had again stopped Le Duc. In addition to his reflection, he examined the college aged employee inside. He fixed his hair and, in so doing, gestured suggestively. But the woman turned from Le Duc and instead looked over at his intern, who, in turn, dashed into nearby shrubbery. The shrubs were small, and prevented decent hiding. He looked less like a man hiding in a shrub, and more like a man wearing a shrub for underpants.

SPEECH BY FATHER PAUL SHANLEY TO THE PSYCHOLOGICAL PANEL
AT THE BOSTON/BOISE COMMITTEE CONFERENCE ON
“LEGAL, PSYCHOLOGICAL, AND ETHICAL ISSUES OF
INTERGENERATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS,” COMMUNITY CHURCH,
BOSTON, DECEMBER 2, 1978

Right now, without any reservation at all, I’m going to get into the shit, and that is a beautiful thing. Some of what I say is going to be prophetic. Some’s going to be nasty. In short order I’m going to talk about a recent roast beef sandwich I ate, and there’s nothing subtle about that. In fact, if you try to make a delicate roast beef sandwich, you’re going to fail in making a good roast beef sandwich, especially if you want cheese in it, and slippery vegetables—leaving condiments out for the moment. If you say subtlety, all I’m saying is that a roast beef sandwich will say, “Fuck you.”

I’m truly humbled to be delivering today’s invocation. (I am tempted, in fact, to utilize all the time Jack Tiernan’s allotted me and applaud all of you for its entirety, for your intrepidity, your braving of taboo and censure to attend this conference.) My humility is shot through with purest of joys, and my joy is itself shivering. Shivering with what I do not know, but I like it. I like it a lot. Have you ever been to a roller rink when a boy of eight or nine is having his birthday? Do you know that expression when he sets out on the rink with his skates, delicate in his movements, thrilled? That’s me talking to you right now.

On to the sandwich. I was, just moments ago, at The Sub Conscious on Pleasant Street. Not the best place, I know, to put one’s thoughts together

prior to a speaking engagement. It is my custom to get sermons and such written during lap swim at the Y. Swimming, I find, is both a creative stimulator and judicious editor. Alas, today I missed lap swim, and the only available time at the pool was “free swim.” A dangerously misleading term, “free swim.” Free swim combines lap swim with unstructured youth recreational activity, and whenever I attend I am so immediately taken by its reckless goings on that my concentration vaporizes and before I know it I’m lecturing a group of youngsters on the finer points of my favorite splash dive, the Teddy Bear. Those of you who have seen Father Paul in swim trunks can attest to what a reckoning he is with his Teddy Bear.

So no swimming for Father Paul today. I followed, instead, my stomach, and soon found myself at The Sub Conscious, jawing a steak bomb and working through my notes. I was making good headway when tragedy struck. Now, it takes a lot to make something so joyful as a steak bomb—essentially a steak and cheese, but with salami and, for me, ketchup—tragic. A steak bomb is, in sandwich form, joy. I would qualify this as male joy, because it is conclusive. It follows every step in the male satisfaction ritual: there is, in the ordering, flirtation; then, in waiting while it’s made, arousal. Then consumption, the satisfaction and, afterward, a moment of respite and reflection before getting up to leave. It is male joy because it is finite joy. Not the mysterious, circular, open ended female joy, which has its place. (For the record: I do not know where that place is; I’ve never been invited.) In short,

for me, for a man, for Father Paul, there is nothing more satisfying than a steak bomb. The word 'bomb,' alone, is instructive: just as a real bomb explodes, so does pleasure throughout the male body upon consumption of the steak bomb. And it is no coincidence, too, that a bomb will figure prominently at the end of my remarks, shooting a jolt of association through your minds, leaving you something to chew on before regurgitating it, with care, at the ethics panel tomorrow morning.

But tragedy did, indeed, come down upon my steak bomb. Tragedy, here, sat at a nearby booth, and was incarnate in a six year old boy who ogled me. Ogled with ferocity, comrades. And what's more—in his claws he, too, held a steak bomb. But his was, incredibly, the Steak Bomb Colossus, a sandwich of such obnoxious girth that I have never entertained its consumption. Yet he ate it, in full, and not from left to right or right to left as is typical, but from top to bottom. I have only seen the most mountainous of construction workers take on the Colossus, and here before me a little urchin destroyed it like a strong wave would a sand castle. My appetite dashed away. Upwards of fifteen muscles charley horsed. I was paralyzed—mentally, physically, and spiritually—for what I later figured to be about twenty minutes. When I recovered, the boy was gone. I looked down at my notes and what remained of my steak bomb. Composure crept back into me, as did, slowly, thankfully, my appetite. I resumed eating. Then, and this was

a surprise, inspiration struck. I dropped sandwich and crumpled my prepared notes. I had changed topic. No—my topic had been changed for me.

If, in ancient tragedy, there exists an insurmountable force that, when agitated, destroys the tragic hero, then on stage at The Sub Conscious this afternoon, I played the role of this hero, and the tragic force was violent, boyish desire. My tragic flaw? Vulnerability.

You do recognize this boy, don't you comrades? Certainly you recognize the teenager this boy turns into. You've seen him—embraced by TV news, wrapped in the caring folds of newspaper reportage. Does it not nauseate you how these teenage vermin are so coddled? Who do these losers think they are? Who are these young men, whose early relationships with mature men drive them public with a "victimhood," who "suffer" and "commit suicide" because of what an older man "did"? Why, what wishful myths! The public's naïve belief that innocence is a youthful property prevents rational thought and fosters this mass delusion. The truth is, comrades, that the older party in the intergenerational relationship never initiates. Lust is a young animal.

Let's see a show of hands. How many of you think it coincidence that this evil creature, this Hairless Predator, was at The Sub Conscious?

A fair share of you, sadly.

Professionals in your fields, veterans of the game, rogue boy lovers alike— ignorant, innocent! You know, and I'm going off script here, I'm getting that feeling again. That giddiness I mentioned earlier, that *on-the-roller-rink* feeling? It's back. With all those shiny palms thrust in the air, you showed me how green you are. You all, unwittingly, play into The Hairless Predators' uncalloused hands. It tickles me. You can't imagine the joy it will give me to peel back the Predators' grip on your senses.

The first truth I'll give you is this: the Steak Bomb Colossus is not the sandwich of choice for your standard young boy. They just don't eat them. It's too much, and much too tough to digest. One requires a stomach of tightly woven chain mail, and intestines of PVC pipe. This fact alone should make The Hairless Predator's presence at The Sub Conscious fishy. But let me deliver some real evidence. Let's take a hypothetical look at a day in the life of this doughy Predator.

This morning, the morning of my steak bomb, my Hairless Predator, lets call him Stuart Burgess Henderson, lay basking in a sun drenched bed. Golden light performed intricate East European folk dances across his linens and fair skin. Awake, he waited, plump and smug, for his mother, Maureen Henderson, to coax him from bed. No easy task, this, as young Stuart relishes his rest. In time, Stuart was led, yawning, to the kitchen, and then up into his high chair, where food was guided into his mouth. It was Saturday, and mother Maureen would not take Stuart to school. Instead, she gave Stuart a

blank menu for the day's activities. Stuart carelessly regarded the menu and, without surprise, saw himself in its openness. There he was: infinite possibility. The cosmos, comrades, checked himself out in the mirror. In boredom, he declared his day's schedule: several public appearances, slow walks past four outdoor construction sites, an unseasonable dip into the Y for crafts, and a late lunch at a working class eatery.

The day went by. I'm sure you can picture it: Stuart Henderson's head swam with designs for each laborer, teacher, and camp counselor who punctuated his day. I wonder what they thought of this young boy, nearly obscured by a baby fat which, six years in, made no intimations of leaving. I wonder what they thought of Stuart Henderson and his advances. Oh, comrades, it pained one to watch. I wished to say to him, "Stuart Henderson, if you can pack your Saturday with an array of activities giving you access to all sorts of men and escorted trips to the potty five times an hour, surely you can fit some room in for exercise. It would only enhance your chances, make you more attractive. Stuart Henderson, do you have any idea how doughy you are? I hate you, Stuart. If only you took some exercise and firmed up. Exercise, Stuart Henderson, exercise. Just a lick of it!"

Excuse me, comrades—rage ran me off script.

But do you see what I mean about Stuart Henderson? How manipulation and desire are hardwired into his mind and metabolism? How

urgent the struggle is to keep men safe from Stuart and his like? For what does Stuart Henderson and those like Stuart Henderson do once they get what they want in the way of cheap romance? They declare a very public victimhood is what. They clog our human services. They write terrible songs. And, perhaps most cretinously, they end their spiritual and, in some cases, physical lives, leaving our church and world with the gruesome impact of their cliché.

Here's an alternate way to confront Stuart Henderson and The Hairless Predators of your own life. When you find one on the street, see him not as child, but as suicide bomber. That's right. His is a selfish, extremist, lust-filled insurgency of one; he lives only for his own pleasure and fights only for his own immortality. If and when he cannot sate his lust, he kills himself and whomever surrounds him. If they survive, family, friends, and lovers are traumatized. Through his final act, The Hairless Predator burns his own negative image into the world, into us. There's a flash, the invocation to an atomic bomb and we, while we live, bear his final signature. It is not Stuart, then, who dies. It is we. We feel the knife twisting in our backs. We turn and, dying, say, "Et tu, Stuart Henderson?"

Back to the roast beef sandwich. I recovered from Henderson, finished the steak bomb, left The Sub Conscious, and walked here.

I know you were expecting a short prayer and instead I've gone on about a sandwich and some awful kid. I'd have gone ahead with a standard blessing, but would have felt remiss if I didn't warn you of the awesome power of young lust. Stuart Henderson is not its sole purveyor, comrades. His colleagues are innumerable. Indeed, Hairless Predation constitutes one of our contemporary world's tragic forces; and our vulnerability to it, one of the world's most tragic flaws.

I leave you with a dream. A dream, I admit, is not a prayer. But a dream is like a prayer in that it takes us to a wonderful place we cannot stay. Comrades, I have a recurring dream. I visit a prison to do some prison ministry. It's a crisp autumn day. The prison is a majestic, austere, facility. I walk into its courtyard, and am thrilled by what I find. No, I do not see honest, loving men of the cloth. I do not see members of our oppressed groups, serving sentences based upon the darkness of their skin. And nor do I see any of your faces, comrades. Heavens no! I look out and instead see hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of miserable, soft Stuart Hendersons, suffering through rehabilitation, paying their debt to all of us. Wearing identical prison garb, they pace, play basketball, bench press dumbbells, shoot craps. Several, I see, smoke cigarettes! The sight fills me with such joy that I awake in tears.

Join me, colleagues, in praying that this dream, through God's divine intercession, may be made reality. Keep this hope alive in your work, in your play, and in your prayers.

Thank you, and Amen.

LETTERS TO A YOUNG MISOGYNIST

My Dear Connor,

I'm going to alight on an unfair note, sustain it a measure and then let it fall from the mouthpiece with unruly flatulence. There is a condition, *misogyny*, male hatred of the female. Men of this persuasion are *misogynists*. I count myself among their ranks. What irks me, though, is the absence of a complementary term for my enemy. There was the early, troglodytic feminism, the vulgar *man-hater*. Perhaps, a female acquaintance suggested, there's a *clinical* term for such women? While nodding—exercising the male conversation reflex—I silently guffawed. All men may hate women but only the insane returns the favor! It tickled me, Connor.

I have no doubt that these clinical ladies exist. Beaten by a life which has somehow been sexed male, they live like angry poodles of the elderly, chewing table legs when the fleshy ankle of a toddler doesn't avail itself. Yes, fine. I can picture that. I can get some pleasure out of that. But they're not the only ones. Nature won't stand for it. All tendencies have their counter and we, my hairless friend, have colleagues. Would that they stand and be counted I'd break bread with them. But their silence, the silence of the status

quo, pronounces an answer clearly on their behalf: *No, boys. We will remain hidden.*

So, Connor—in conducting informal research by way of our day’s oracle, the search engine, you visited my dearly departed weblog, *Sweet Home Hanover: The Sweaty Travails of a Dartmouth Alum*, where, for a time in the 1990s, I funneled my youthful disdain for what I called cultural VD. You were drawn to a post of speculation—of science *nonfiction*—where I foretold a future where sexual reproduction had become old hat, and the world would no longer “needed” women to put forward its finest. I admit to scrolling back through the archives to re-read that piece on occasion, and took occasion to do so after your reading your note. I was thrilled anew by the youthful vigor of my prose, but also embarrassed at its oily, pubescent passages. My dream there, you see, was nothing but a counterpoint to the lesbian fantasy of egg fusion, of reproduction *sans spermatozoon*. And that Connor, as we know, *ain’t happening*.

I’m no scientist, Connor—more a dilettante. I read what the French call *vulgarisme* to keep abreast of what I can. But, and with no false modesty, I can safely state that in certain disciplines I know my stuff. Culture, the arts, theology, pedagogy—these constitute my expertise. It is rare to receive a piece of mail from today’s youth—as one ages, the young become more and more a foreign race—and even more rare to hear from one with passions in

the right places. And so your letter was received as more a communiqué from an alien life form than mail from a college student. I am gratified you enjoyed my posts, Connor, and saw fit to compose not an *email*—that cheap cousin to correspondence—but a letter, handwritten, and if not a letter well wrought, at least well meaning. If you are as committed to learning as your letter makes evident, I'd be honored to serve as your mentor, as counterpoint to the illiberal arts education which now pursues you.

If there is a point of contact between me and the illiberals, it's in the belief that the more one is educated, the more one finds misogynists. Indeed, Connor: the very endeavor of education creates misogyny. The illiberals and I arrive at our conclusion by different means and to different ends, but at this one juncture in our syllogisms we meet. Curious, then, how you and I embark. Am I, your educator, to create in you a misogynist, where before there wasn't one?

Before we begin, an admission. I admit, Connor, to being unsettled by your letter. It bore no uncertain smell—you composed it in your dorm room after pizza, no? Or video games where the controller was greased by the hands of another pizza eater? For with what must have been the slipperiest of pens you wrote of your Patricia. You were smitten with her, you wrote, and from her you are now estranged. You made your attempts. The flirtations you mentioned—purple email with video attachment, love professed with

original soundtrack—filled me with an urgency, and prompted my reply. You are lucky, Connor. Only the most odious bird would respond favorably to such advances, a woman who would never merit your effort, let alone a song in her honor. Believe me.

Now Patricia is gone and will never return. Like all good heartbreak, there's the feeling of a loss akin to a death in the family. But romance does death one better. The object of your grief still walks the earth to give other men pleasure. *Other* men will know Patricia, Connor, and you never will. Do you feel the bite of that injustice? Do you feel how, in her living absence, your love composts, and a cool, metallic hatred sprouts? Good. Make lemonade with that lemon. With luck, hatred will fill you and you will fall in love again—except, this time, this love will target not one woman, but spill out equally over all. Hatred, Connor, is not without love, is not love's opposite. That would be indifference, aloofness, all the feline emotions in which sex we know to expect. No. Hatred, while certainly not love, is love's shadow and moves where does its partner. Hatred, too, is a bond, with attachment, affection, and its own take on lovemaking. Note well: I do not encourage physical abuse—our sorry society has strictures now against it—but I want you to know it for what it is, and implore you: if you must do it, do it safely. While this lovemaking's diseases are not medical but social, they too can be chronic, even fatal.

I write to you from a café in a coastal town, a suburb of San Diego. Fog obscures a beach only weeks ago ringed with red tide. In front of me is a man, his son, and a young woman, playing at adult but close in age to the boy. It is clear that the father has been intimate with this young woman, and intends on keeping terms intimate well into the future. Who wouldn't? She's "hot," Connor. And yet, and yet—yes, Connor, always an *and yet*—the beauty has tragically "given it up smooth" to this middle aged chump in whose floral pattern shorts nods a love muscle doubtlessly withered by age. There's public acknowledgment of verbal obscenity, Connor, but what of obscenity incarnate? I look at the son who covets his father's lay. It's too much. I'm packing up. Where's my laptop case?

Remind me, in your reply, to speak about cathexis, and why we should cast it directly into the ground.

Sincerely,

Sean

Dear Connor,

It's early for this. But maybe a whiff of the absolute will whet the appetite.

Endangered sea beasts swim their lives away in hopeless pursuit of a mate. To me, this is the ideal love life. I find its possibilities expansive, liberating, and, frankly, erotic.

This will no doubt confuse, and on many levels. Let me say only this: the crude manifestation of this eroticism is hatred. But beneath it—*beyond it*—there is freedom.

Best,

Sean

Airspace, USA

Connor,

I'm back on the surface now.

I kept the last note brief. A nurse before a squealing toddler, I pinched, injected. Its contents will circulate and, in future years, grow out from you. To answer your question, yes: look no further than our clerical orders.

Consider, a moment, the seat. Just now, in line for the john, a man stood before me, a woman behind. I have a zero tolerance policy for eye contact while waiting in gloryless lines—I brought a volume of Proust along—but I did briefly regard the man before me, as did he me. No question. He entered, exited; I entered, and stopped. I stopped, were it possible, twice. Not only was the seat down, so was the seat cover. If he knew I was to follow, that this gesture in no way aided my sanitary maneuvers, why did he do it? Was he stalling me, hoping that by the time I lifted cover and spied his performance he'd be farther down the aisle than he might've been otherwise? I lifted the seat. I took a peak and, as would a sommelier, brushed at the air above the bowl to invite his bouquet. No, this young man had nothing to hide. Anger welled up in me as stomach gas plummeted downward. I got to work.

When, in leaving, I left both seat *and* seat cover up, I did so to send a message to the young woman next in line (who was wading into adulthood): ‘Do not worry about my having soiled the seat, Dear; if you were a man intent on ignoring a reclined seat and soiling it, I would have foiled your plans and maintained the cleanliness of this room we share for the next five hours.’

Returning to the considerate man of my first paragraph, circling him rather, as would a bird of prey around lunch: this fool has obviously been chastised—who hasn’t!—for making maneuvers of the fair sex more demanding. So, in putting the seat down, he leaves not only pee-pee but chivalry in the bowl. Obviously, indirectly, he has reaped benefits from such courtesy, and has naturalized the routine. He has learned his lesson to the degree that men, as excrementary agents, may be ignored. We, Connor, fellow men, do not exist to him! Why, he’s a puppy of no pedigree whose greatest aspiration is a decent coddling by the women of the world. He minces about, the poor thing. Meanwhile, Connor, you and I, we circle overhead.

Where I live in Massachusetts, there is a movement to rid public buildings of gendered restrooms. The difference between man and woman spans galaxies within inches, but you wouldn’t know it from how people speak there. I’ll address the theory that lies at the seat of our problem. In her devastating critique of John Gray’s simpleton’s classic, *Men are From Mars*,

Women Are From Venus, black female insurgent intellectual Bell Hooks goes so far as to say 1.) She is black female insurgent intellectual Bell Hooks, 2.) Men and women are not essentially different, and 3.) She is black female insurgent intellectual Bell Hooks. While I agree with her first and final utterance, admire her exercise in tautology, marvel at the toddlersque mirror stage in which identity politics has her encased, I demur at length with her middle statement, the meat of her vanity sandwich. Bell is beholden to the idea that gender is a verb, a malleable substance to be conjugated and shaped by any and all. There are no essential differences between man and woman; all humans can embrace and become a gender of their choice.

To rebut Bell, Connor, I sound a rhythmic recitative of armpit farts; ring from far off mountaintops the international sound for boner, *fd-d-d-d-d-d-d*, or, domestically, *oing-oing-oing-oing*; I start war; screw a millennia of prostitutes; scratch myself a millennia more; masturbate many times a moment; dominate politics and the earth for oh, *forever*. Join me, Connor, in saying, “No, Bell Hooks. Nothing essentially different there. Gender’s a verb and it jazzes me up!”

Don’t let my levity obscure the seriousness here. These toilet activists are nothing but terrorists out to destroy the separation of man and woman with feminist tracts for their Koran. They are a global threat: today, in British press, I read of a “gender jihad” in Barcelona. Daily, gender takes a beating in bathrooms and is left for dead. And now, to assert such reactionary a doctrine

as biology on a restroom door is an act of oppression! The layers and convolutions of contradiction here are breathtaking. (Connor, if you have an inhaler for any asthma, keep it on you at all times. One never knows when womankind will attempt to take your breath away for good!)

We must fight this antigenderism with all that we have, Connor. For if there are no men and no women, where are we left? When the suicide bomber, the ululating feminist, runs into the john and detonates, and the wall between the men's and ladies' rooms collapses, dissolving the difference between he and she, where are we?

There's no better time than now for LeRoi Jones' play *The Toilet*. Keep an eye out for it at used bookstores. In the meantime, do not hesitate to defecate with those of your own sex. Do so with pride. And, in those situations—at a friend's apartment, or on an airplane—where the john is unisex and the position of the seat is in question, apply one rule to all. It's the least you can do.

Yours,

Sean

Dear Connor,

Do you know what tickles me? The blue collar man's "office." My, how those grubby drones *love* to play office. A moment ago, a mechanic told me (with relish): "Wait in my orrffice." I was shocked, delighted; with his surfeit of tongue flesh and economy of eloquence and teeth, he seemed to invite me to adjourn to his *orifice*. No, he replied, with furrowed brow, "My *orr-ffice!*" If, by office, he meant any room designated as such with an Apple 2E draped in plastic and at least one cross-eyed apprentice flipping through a car-and-skin magazine, *well....*

Connor, all of us on this page speak English. Yes, of course. Sure. *But*, in speaking with these American *clerical* workers, insurmountable language barriers became apparent. As I waited in the orrffice, a customer, a fellow working man, came in and delivered a joke to the swollen teen at the desk. The joke had to do with the room's various doors and how he didn't know which was the proper one for entering and exiting. Both had a good laugh at this. I sat silently, brows lowered. What, Connor, was funny?

Fortunately, insight struck. My brow leavened. All our bodily senses—down to the fine matter of one's sense of humor—are fashioned for us by the

social element into which our mothers squeeze us. Consequently, each order of humanity has its own sense of humor; if you do not grow up in a particular element, you will never laugh at its jokes. There, in the waiting room, it was not only the joke I did not get—I did not receive the upbringing and social inheritance which gives it meaning. And, Connor, thank God for that.

I should make clear, Connor, I do not write of a metropolitan city. No, it's the country, albeit that part of the country so close to town so as to forfeit all charm. The inhabitants, though, are distinctly country people. No, not people. *Folks*. And what a strange breed they are. Largely of European extraction, these folks are creased, pointed, folded flat. Shoulders want nothing to do with heads and flee downward. Thin chests. Cheeks sheer, climbed by blemish and the most loose of facial hair, all faces mount a vicious assault on all senses of the word *attractive*. Over the body, clothing culled from the most uncultured of 60s and 80s fashion. I walked into two separate music stores on Route 7, and recognized not a single disc. They, it seems, have their own music, adolescent rap music with the excesses of 70s and 00s rock thrust upon it.

In Spain, Connor, citizens refer to Latin and South Americans as *gente de poca cultura*. People of little culture. I'd say the same for where I find myself now, but take the Iberian prejudice a step further: these are *un gente diferente, un specie diferente*. Another species entirely. I wonder where they'd fit in on the Nazi's ranking of the races, if at all.

I've had a similar conversation with American men on the topic of women. Are women, they ask, of a different species? The answer, an absolute and unequivocal *yes*, finds evidence in the various physiological, emotional, and spiritual differences between sexes. Take as instance the anterior cruciate ligament, or ACL, which holds the knee together. An ACL injury is excruciating. It is, also, fortunately, ironically, an injury to which women are especially prone. Especially, Connor, during ovulation, a time of increased estrogen production. Are you connecting these dots, Connor, with a tendon of your budding intellection? When women are at their most essentially female, they are weak at the knees! Nature comes to man's aide, attacking the female skeleton in the ruse of a reproductive process now rewritten: *Be fruitful, and fall apart!*

I mention all this to derail your approach to life and its ladies. If you are to approach women, do so with true ignorance, D.T. Suzuki's "beginner's mind." Given the ample moisture behind your ears and what want of wisdom you've displayed in your letters, you will have little problem in this regard. Assume nothing. Do not utilize anthropology. To do so would affirm the humanity of women. It may not be the case.

Yours,

Sean

Connor,

Sometimes I cry myself to sleep over the plight of the waitress. Did you know that the waitress has been emptied of free will and can sustain herself no other way? I just can't stop the tears, Connor. We must, as men, as customers, pitch money, continually, her way, to help her. To support her!

So goes the logic of the employed woman: Man, bring the bacon to work, too.

A mural in town illustrates 'Great Moments In Local Women's History.' And let's see: the women sew, cook, and chat. One looks like she's nagging, but it's hard to tell. Were I to provide a caption for this mural, I'd be chastised as sexist. Does sexist mean calling a duck a duck? Is our world so wrought by relativism that reality is now sexist? Huh?

Quack.

Sean

Connor,

It's not much but I'll give you this: you're generous. I've never asked, and you've recounted intimate encounters with detail I've never hoped to know, all so woefully chosen. You've the raw calling of the misogynist, I have no doubt. But polish is badly wanting. The stories linger and throb like a bruise. I have watched your grimace as you stared down your abdomen at the "boner" in absentia; I've followed your hand into a "huge bush" to try and locate "it"; and I've been there to follow the "bob" of "bad head." To be honest, Connor, they resemble clips from B horror films. I must remind you: fear is by far the basest reason to hate. Ours must be more nuanced.

Still, I'm not without humor. In the spirit of chanting tales I shall return the favor with a story of my own, from college.

Connor, you've seen me. I sent a full body action shot. Playing tennis, I believe. It's a bit dated, but you get the idea. I'm not a great looking guy. When a woman pursues me aggressively there is usually something wrong. It happens infrequently, and when it does accompanies an ulterior motive. Still, this one intimacy I'm about to recount involves a woman who wasn't without

charm. There was intelligence. There were breasts of no small import, and certainly a personality.

Then we took our clothes off.

The breasts I had been coveting? Over which I had wished to swim the butterfly stroke? Where I had rested many a fortnight's worth of dreams? I don't know where that bosom went, Connor. It certainly wasn't what flesh I now encountered. If, for women, the brassiere is a garment of support, for men it is a garment of disappointment.

We began. We made various passes over each other's erogenous zones. My buttocks, if I remember, were particularly ticklish that spring afternoon. I sighed, said something like, "thanks, that feels good," but at no volume to compete with her theatrical moaning. Moaning that was, on her part, counterproductive, for I'm positive that among the sensations my hands were responsible for, pleasure was not one. And moaning only encouraged more of this poor excuse for pleasure.

She said, "Sorry for the underwear." But she should've said, "I'm sorry about the absurdity of hair that swallows my underwear. You can't see, but my underwear has a tacky floral pattern." Do you see how I handle the subject? Can you appreciate the agility of my exegesis? It's aesthetics, Connor. Diction. Like underwear and body hair, there are certain parts of our speech that need covering. Do not deliver your prejudice like some college educated organic farmhand to market, but as artist to a gallery of sophisticates.

The rest of the encounter? Not much to speak of, except she did propose we try a “Russian,” and after manually releasing me from my obligations called me “one tough cookie.”

Yours,

Sean

Connor,

No more, Connor! I can't keep what stories you've given me in my possession, let alone take more. I give them back to you: Amanda, to whom you were to read the verses of Dryden, nothing; Patricia, whose back, touched en route to a dance floor, turned on you; drunken flippy-flap with a roommate's aunt—virginity, sobriety, scruples, and, for her, fidelity, gone; manual relief, on occasion, in college. After graduation, Becca. She would fellate but not consummate. Your neighbor, with fiancé, child, and amplified bosom—you trusted she had an IUD in as you did not “roll one” on. It was lightning round lovemaking; you could say she took it as it came. And then “Deb,” whose “head” truly “sucked.” It reduced you to essentials, and not in a good way. You tried—heavens how you tried. Bathed in sweat, you could not, alas, conclude.

A handful of encounters, and painfully spaced. Similar to the torture method where pain, doled in intervals, never terminates. All at once, pain can be dealt with. A man has mechanisms.

It's urgent your “game” be tightened. You mustn't misogynize by bitterness. Sure, you could, but only our most uncultured of colleagues do.

Bitterness is bush league, Connor. It infects the body, is manifest in the woeful physiques of the embittered. You've seen them if you've spent any time in the YMCA lockers (and especially if your Y's locker room has a sauna): men who sport bellies that conceal useless, doughy puppies. Men who've got scrotums like bloated baby rattles, and worse vocabularies than a backhoe. Again: misogyny, Connor, should be born of a surfeit of intellect, not for a lack of "pelt." It's truth we're after, not a distortion that prejudice or stupidity can bring.

Now, if I may, I'd like to offer some unsolicited bedroom advice: never relent to preemptive fellatio. Understand your Stacy's selfish motives. She head'd you off. She knew if you received conclusive pleasure, there'd be no further physical commitment on her part. I recommend preempting her attack with your own: go straight to the Y for hors d'oeuvres and move impatiently in for a shot on goal.

The vital work comes before the bedroom, of course. Start with selection. Just the names of your prospects—Deb, Stacy, whomever else—tell me you are looking at a narrow selection of women. I can envision them: slender mutts, vaguely Italian of stock, orange, exquisitely gendered, toting handbags fashioned after small, internal organs. Whatever happened to casting a wide net? What about Nubians, Connor? Mediterraneans, tomboys, Asians?

As for getting a body in bed with you, I have nothing sophisticated to say. Sophistication speaks little on the subject. Simply do not try. If you must try, try hard not to try. Wallow in those conditions that are gendered female and skirt indifference: ignorance, oblivion, etc. Narcissa will come running. Success, Connor, genitals. In cruelty lies our endurance: meanness is not only a flirtation but nature's greatest aphrodisiac. We weren't lucky like the tiger to be born with a barb on our penis. We must fashion one otherwise.

Do not be daunted by your project. In fact, the less mind you pay it, the better. Certainly don't pout! From what I gather about the dinner episode you describe, you grew dour and socially ingrown on our brief encounter with the waitress—Joni, if I remember. Now, from our perspective, a sad woman can be an easy one, with little esteem and few consequent scruples. But no woman, not even the most frail or stupid, picks out the sour man from the crowd and yields herself to him. Sir Philip Sidney had a place to stick it before he wrote *Astrophil and Stella*, for instance. So perk up, man.

I should qualify this incitement. Surely, in the face of woman, I want you to be depressed. But not in the typical Connorian sense. I want you to be depressed by the *reality* of woman, not a fantasy stand-in. Depressed after having experienced woman, not in the lead up. With success in bed—if and when you “get some”—will come the true disappointment. You will witness the world's most potent disappointment, in fact. It will penetrate all levels of

existence and will be incarnate, in front of you, in womankind's regrettable genitals.

"What?" you will ask, "I've rubbed myself raw, for this?"

Yes, Connor, "it" is. A train wreck. Gore, Connor, and it's all you get. Nature slaps you one for succeeding to engage in that act which furthers her interests—life, I presume. "Mother" Nature, indeed.

Let this foreknowledge soften the trauma of your disappointment. While not good news, it should take some fire from your loins—and, consequently, unfortunately, make you more attractive to woman. You will then see more of this wonderful genitalia than you can shake a stick at. Hooray. And with "success," experiential knowledge will supplant any caveat I can give you.

By now, you are likely feeling this: "If I don't get any, I'm all depressed. But if I get laid, I'll be disappointed. What gives, Sean?"

Very little, Connor. I didn't make the rules. Whether you don't or do, you're damned. Might as well get damnation over with, or at least get it started. You'll fondle this issue for the rest of your life.

Your consolation will be your company—you will not be alone in this grief. You will (someday) be joined in a regrettable relationship with a woman who also feels there's something amiss. She'll approximate it with a vulgarity from the soft sciences, penis envy perhaps. And her voice will join

the silent, tragicomic chorus of all mankind who, in sympathy, also wish for 'something there.' In the most generous act of the male imagination, in a symbolic philanthropy that will, of course, go overlooked, you will come forward with your most intimate possession and proffer your own private part to the lady in need—donate to that space which is so bare, so wanting. So awful.

Yours,

Sean

Connor,

I was a toddler at the beach. I waddled up to my mother and spoke to her of a personal revelation.

I know how to make friends, I said.

How, she asked.

I stand by a group and wait till one asks me to play.

I'll let that anecdote sit, and let its implications bleed into current events. Today I spent the afternoon walking around town, silently, waiting for a woman, a specific woman, to run into me, initiate conversation, and promptly fall in love. My chances were low. But did I run into her? Twice. Hard to believe, yes. But did I speak to her? No, Connor, not until I was spoken to. Terribly passive of me, terribly feminine, but also, terribly familiar.

You mentioned, in your letter, the worn refrain, "girls are crazy." This usage of prefabricated prejudice disappoints me. While in small part I agree with you, today I'm apt to question my own sanity. Must I admit then, in myself, both male and female essences in equal, or lopsided, proportion? And, if so, where am I left? Must I hate a portion of myself?

The confusion will pass. Often, in a past I hearken back to with nostalgia, I felt no confusion. Nature reinforced with its awesome majesty my masculinity, gathered me up in its current and guided not only my actions, but psychological and creative male energies. Now, it's just the opposite. The world closes in, threatens, mixes me up. I am caught in existence' digestive system, and it is having its way with me.

I see, too, that you are in the grips of confusion. You botched a coffee date. But what equanimity and wisdom are here required of me as your teacher are those qualities which escape me. I'm beginning to get whiffs of it as it escapes—as if it, byproduct of a bodily function, produces an odor. Patience, too, Connor, has left me. I reach for it, but find it gone. How I need it now when, in the face of my own confusion, I confront yours. I will try to stow my troubles and address your woes. Here goes.

Of the number of things you could stand to improve, Connor, I cannot pick just one and offer suggestions as to its betterment. Nor do I think such an approach would be productive. It is not a worthy pursuit just like digging through a glacier with a bendy straw is not a worthy pursuit. I propose something quite different. It combines edification with the grand, insurmountable edifice of your imperfections. No, I do not want you disheartened. Rather, I want you to face up to the monstrous façade of your imperfection and, experiencing what Kant called the numerical sublime, become inspired. Let your hopeless lack of skill ride through you like a

vigilante cop on horseback and kill off all the “bad guys” in you—but also, and importantly, breathe back into you a new, improved life.

There is a feeling I get reading of your failings. You are like a sea bass on a midwestern sidewalk, flopping for days, refusing to die. Connor, have you ever seen a male dog, in frustration, grow aroused? I’m tempted to express my solidarity with such a dog and simply bark at you. You make me laugh. You make me angry. Most of all, you make me feel alive—as any good, strong pain does. In what pain it takes to assist you, I locate my subjectivity and inhabit it fully. It’s a wonderful refreshment of all my faculties. And then, as with a man at a hanging, or the frustrated dog, I grow, strangely, unexpectedly, *pedagogically*, horny. I, Connor, have what you might call “teacher’s wood.”

I am not in the least bit strange for my desires. It’s equivalent to God’s behavior to his new monks. In his treatise, *Degrees of Humility*, St. Bernard dishes on how God enters and shapes the will of his novitiate. I’ll let Thomas Merton paraphrase: “The final result, in the soul that submits to this action of God, is that the will softens and is made smooth and pliant and tractable, like well-greased leather. It can be ‘stretched.’¹” And then, with more accommodation for grace, there can be an unfettered union with God.

I’m not God, Connor, but your ignorance does invite a similar education. I teach you vigorously in hopes that your understanding becomes

¹ Thomas Merton, *The Waters of Siloe* (New York: Harcourt, 1977) 25.

more supple and relaxed, more “like well greased leather,” to permit more education, facilitate future self-education, and hasten your development as man and misogynist. Then, my job done, I will leave our endeavor, satisfied, never to call on you again.

Sean

Connor,

I often find myself in the company of bores, female in intent if not in body, who expect my endless audience. The other night I was in the company of such an extraordinary bore. I was bored, in fact, into fascination by how boring she was, such that I was, again, interested. Ooh, I thought. *Tricky*. As a virus would morph in order to regain its power, this trait of woman shifted before my eyes to reinvigorate its attack. I grew cautious, Connor. I took notes.

It was social gathering, yes, though social implies more interaction than what took place. It was like a scene out of a Resnais' *Last Week at Marienbad*: men, more or less statues, positioned throughout a room, too far from each other for the sake of men's conversation. Women, like seagulls, perched on shoulders and talked at men not so much in the King's English but the language of seagulls. The mute men periodically nudged their crotches to make an accounting of their genitals—to verify that their equipment had not, in horror, escaped into their guts. It looked like a roomful of one-on-one services at once—one preacher, one parishioner. Have you been to the priest's quarters at Boston College? A small chapel is lined with

altars where, before someone at the Vatican caught a whiff, priests fulfilled their daily obligation to the Sacrament, rapid fire. The Vatican decried this mass production of sacredness and halted it. Which is very well. But would that the Holy See come down as hard on the room where I found myself—where, in ritual, boredom usurped salvation!

The seagull on my shoulder, let's call her Gully, told me things: what she did that day, the days leading up to that day, what she liked to do on an average day, and, for each of those days, why. I didn't time the conversation, but that's because the hands of my watch bent themselves into an infinity symbol (∞). Connor, here was a life exclusively taken with the smelling of its innumerable carnations, an emotional register that started with pity and ended on sweetness. Gully would go from "feeling bad" about a tragedy reported on TV to seeing one of her own small concerns in that tragedy, which provided a neat segue to holding forth about something she's "really interested in." Vile, Connor. I'd go so far as to call it sentiment's pornography. I've since recovered, but upon leaving the party that night, I inhaled the fresh air of dying summer and sighed for its delicacy.

Yours,

Sean

Connor,

What sentiments I express to you are not acceptable in many quarters. Fortunately, they are quarters I find quite comfortable. Still, it's no death defying, hour length orgasm. I field questions, asked and implied, from these women and their loyal eunuch pets.

"Sean," they ask, "why should your ideas be, like, accepted?"

I never respond. But were I to, I'd say this:

"Like a mother to toddler, I want you to love me and all that I think and am unconditionally. Also, I want you to cheer like a stadium of rabid sports fans whenever I move my bowels."

Right there, Connor, that bit with the bowel moving to applause, that's a summation of the pseudo artist. I'm sure you've met an artist who wants you to admire all the sweat and process that went into his work, when the work itself stinks. Me, I'm focused on the stool of this metaphor. I want to be judged on my product. Did I mention, Connor, that I'm an artist, and a brilliant one? I must make a note to do so in a future letter (—perhaps write a letter, post it to myself as reminder....Brilliant, no?).

With misogyny, the product is ever being produced. The process is the product. Do not look ahead to some nirvana; simply direct yourself into the present. You wrote: "This girl, Andrea, I can't wait to try out some of your tricks on her," and later: "I tried some of your tricks out on that girl Andrea, but they didn't work, I don't know what happened." First, Connor, review the comma splice: two independent clauses cannot be connected with a comma. Nor does our misogyny permit such punctuation: the sentence we write never pauses, never ends. Grammar is ever changing; what "tricks" I suggest are not static rules, but malleable guidelines that require your adjustment in each romantic circumstance. Sure, learn the grammar of misogyny once in standardization, so that you recognize it in its guises and permutations, in forms other than the written. But immediately put the grammar to use and personalize it; speak with it in all you are and do.

My boy, if you have any talent in you, you too will let your ego out to launder in the wind. It will billow wistfully, autumnally. It will, wet, dry slowly. Will not, Connor, be comfortable. And then there will be those who consider such honest arrogance, such vulnerability bravado. Ignore them.

When I go out to hoist my ego everyday, I do so with reverence and candor. I lay my laundry out for the world and, without laundry left, stand naked. Bare buttocks, Connor! I slap them with aftershave, receive against them the cold morning wind, and thrill to the possibilities.

Yours,

Sean

Dear Connor,

We all have tastes. But in describing our distastes, we need a different vocabulary. Distaste is its own sense. Similar to our tongue's sense if our tongue registered hatred's flavors.

A distaste strikes as would a metal filing cabinet against a particularly sore spot above our heel. It is uninvited and immediate and contains its own pleasure. For instance, I have delighted in learning about the cutting fad of today's young women. The pleasurable, punishing laceration of the body. I wonder if this bears the mark of karma, but that's probably wishful thinking.

One of the distastes that punctuates my life with its exclamation points is my hatred of women in their 40s and 50s. It is with pleasure that I trace back the genealogy of this hatred and find, at its origin, an elementary school.

I'm of a different generation, Connor. When I was little, when I was *elementary*, only the occasional man taught elementary school, and then only music. If you had, say, a male math teacher, you had a career pervert at the board. No, the teachers were women. The young ones were fresh, perky, full of pluck and, soon enough, fetuses. But while their physique could incite, the rest was dull. As they aged, though, ripening into the beautiful trainwreck of menopause, they grew cruel, crisp; they were as leaves on a branch and about to fall. The wine turned to vinegar. I loved them, Connor.

I remember Mrs. Powers' organic, industrial buttocks. When we walked single file from one class to another, I was *always* first in line to keep behind that marvelous, shifting construction of flesh. What secret, guilty, furtive truths those busy, shimmering orbs imparted to me with their suggestions, their gesticulations beneath cloth. With each step, one buttock rose up, one plummeted down, two beachballs, wondrous spheres into which, surely, I saw my future! We were learning about the industrial revolution, the mills of nearby Lawrence, Massachusetts, and here on Power's posterior all of it was concisely embodied. Coincidence, Connor, or simply superb pedagogy?

As often as I gaze at a decaying leaf in an autumn puddle and weep for my own mortality, I weep for Mrs. Powers' behind. Where is it, I ask, and in what sorry state is it in? Purged of plump life, the rump has likely fallen from Powers by age and by Atkins. Where did it go? Where can I find it? Where is its present manifestation? Did it not reincarnate on another woman but escape Powers entirely to pound, bounce, and frolic about the carpeted halls of Bancroft Elementary forever?

I remember Mrs. Lord, that exquisite pill! To experience Lord was to get an aspirin stuck in the back of your throat, *if your throat were your soul*. Great whorls of black hair, cut by streaks of lightning, whipped around her skull. A fermented majesty pulled taut and pinched her face, drew sharp lines across it. Were I blind, I would press my hands to her face and read all I

wanted. A veritable facial Britannica. No, Connor, World Book! She would be my teacher forever.

Entering school one morning, Lord's instruction to us—this was, I remember, fifth grade—ended with "doing it." I repeated this phrase to myself, to the tune of "Doing it all for my baby" by Huey Lewis and the News. When I passed her, she drew me aside.

What's your name, she asked.

Sean Casey, I said.

Sean Casey, are you a parrot? Do you want me to bring in a parrot costume for you to wear and make you sit in a cage?

Oh Lord, I wonder what happened to your face, hewn by hatred's chisel, drained of all charming hormone. I'm sure it has continued to chew away at itself, at what flesh remains and, running out, now turns to bone and tendon. Her chin, Connor, even when I knew it, could double as a letter opener. Or a spade.

Or, oh Lord, is the transformation complete and now with black wings you dive down on the streets of Andover, pecking at what carrion you find? God Bless.

The small break above this line indicates a cooling off period I prescribed myself after such sweaty reminiscence of Powers and Lord. Now settled, I'm back at the tablet to tell you my hatred of women also comes from

men. My youth basketball coach, Charlie Long, was surely man. Surely is, if still he lives. But as I've grown into my misogyny, he has grown female in my memory. Soft hips pad his frame. Assertions are now made across his chest. Memories mince his step, sweeten his face. And, thus woman, I hate him. I transpose him from male to female and voila! I'm back in business.

Ca-caw!

Sean

Connor,

Your mounting difficulties? I'll say this: an apprenticeship, a learning process, will, if true, be uncomfortable growth. All lessons should be, if anything, traumatic, because nothing sticks with one like trauma. Difficulties are to be welcomed. Keep in mind, though, that my patience, unlike my hatred, has finitude. Take care not to exhaust it by studying your lessons well. Do not exhaust me, Connor.

Some teachers—certainly not the menopausal pedagogues of my own experience—say, “Let learning be fun.” At first, I’m prone to disagree. Little is fun about the discomfort of learning. But, then again, why not? I’m not against fun. I’ll give fun a try. I reverse my position. Connor, let my prose be a “slip-n-slide” on the front lawn of your education, a wet surface you coast down in your ill fitting swim trunks. You are wet, and made yet more wet by learning. Wet not behind ears but all over. Because, like the grass surrounding, you are green. Indeed, the most vital lesson one can learn is that one’s always green. Perpetual youth is what trauma teaches, too, but with cruel emphasis. One’s frozen by trauma. There will always be, in the post-traumatic woman, the little girl she once was.

Connor, you are not a cross-eyed Italian poetaster apprenticing yourself to Dante. You are young man with an exquisite chip on your shoulder apprenticing yourself to Sean Casey. Sure, imitate me. Become one with Sean Casey. Your certain failure is inconsequential. It's the leap that matters. What Kierkegaard called the leap of faith from this world to the beyond you will do in the here and now. Jump out from yourself and into me while staying where and who you are. Do it. Do *me*. Be *me*.

Mimesis is a good method, but not the end. Deepen your imitation of Sean Casey enough and at a point you must transcend Sean Casey. No, you will not go beyond me, but break free of me—leap again, this time from imitation into originality. It's an old method: one learns the rules, and one riffs them off. On NPR today, a young rabbinical student spoke of his training's strictures. The discomfort he likened to the clumsiness of fingers learning classical violin. Once a dexterity is gained, music can be made. I am not advocating Judaism, though its women can be olympic in the sack. Just attend to this one Jew's analogy. It extends beyond the Jew: I hear this music everywhere. Thomas Merton remarked that on entering the monastery for the first time, the doors closed behind him, locking him within the four walls of a new freedom. Constraints, Connor, often contain a larger undoing; in forcing us into certain corners, vast spaces are revealed.

It seems appropriate, in speaking of imitators, for me to end with a brief personal reflection. I wish, at times, for more apprentices. Merton, you

realize, was master of the novitiate at his Abbey of Gesthemeni. Most young, some older—but all young in spirit, unfettered. I wish for young men like you, Connor, perhaps young men a bit smarter than you. I don't mean to be mean to hurt you, Connor. I wish to be mean the way what's real is mean, and meaning is mean; there are individuals above and below us in station and ability. Each has his own permanent station. Education does not enable us to reach a higher station, but establish where we've always been. You, Connor, have your place, and it is neither a sophisticated nor a distinguished one. But how would I fare in the tutelage of a real prodigy, whose early abilities dwarfed my own at his age? In whose letters a potential pounded amid the rhythms of his prose? God, what if the whole male world turned its eyes to me, and I saw my face reflected in billions of eyes, at billions of angles? In whose eyes would be reflected the most handsome Sean Casey? What would the combined image of those billions of me look like? Would I disappear into their stare? Would I speak with my selves?

See, Connor? I, too, have questions. The education continues.

Yours,

Sean

Dear Connor,

Do not miss the trees for the forest!

We hate women. Yes. Of course. Super. But not quite: we hate individuals. Whether it's her, or her, or her, or even *her*, your hate will conform to the contours of an individual woman's personality and be the stronger for it.

Do not miss the trees for the forest.

When you see people walking around, you do not see demographics, races, continents. You see nothing of the sort. That is fiction walking, Connor. No, you see each individual for all she is other than category. And you do not like what you see.

Go now. Take a walk.

Sean

Connor,

Of course, beneath all this hokum is the assumption it is beneficial, somehow, for a man and a woman to be joined. Paired. I am not, Connor, any manner of swishy man, but I am also not sure if this man/woman pairing is the most ideal.

I am often harangued by females for being finicky in picking a mate. They issue commands: Sean Casey, date this person; Sean Casey, date that person. What is never addressed is, Why? Why must I, Connor, be we? Paired, Sean and X? To invite to dinner parties? You've seen my name on paper, Connor, on these letters' bottoms. Does it beg for a plus one?

What women are really saying is simple: you do not suffice, Sean Casey. You are inadequate and need woman to make you whole. Which, Connor, is crap and a revisionist reading of the first book of Genesis.

What if I turn the table on them. Were I to say that they, women, are, somehow, incomplete, that would be sexist of me. Ooh, sexist! That's naughty, right? But it's not what I believe. I don't think women are incomplete. I see them as whole, self actualized, three-dimensional beings. And I simply don't like any of them.

I'm sure you've met women who have no need for company. Solitary, hermits within society. Mysterious, sure. Sexy, perhaps. (Be forewarned: mystery is rarely an indication of bedroom prowess.) The bush I'm barking around is this: I would rather be alone, colleagues in silence with the sexless hermit woman, than have a social cyst—a girlfriend, Connor—attached to me. I value my solitude.

Today's letter, the prose of which is undoubtedly pleasuring you, invokes self pleasure. Onanism. There, I said it. You know it, I believe, as "rubbing one out." Perhaps the purest sex is not what the Greeks suggested, but that love that is with self. To wit: I'm sexy, I can't stand it, and I'm doing something about it. Why then am I tired with the subject? Why do I feel ashamed of this heroic sexual act? Why do I gaze outward, toward society and its women? It just beats the seed out of me.

But, on the other hand: Oh Me So Lonely, Connor. Just now, at CVS, I made quite the scene. I was facing, confronting, a display rack of candy and disposable cameras when, without forethought, I embraced it and began to weep. I wept for several minutes. I wept for all I was worth. I held my precious display rack and rocked back and forth. I continued until two crosseyed clerks pried me away and escorted me outside.

I end on a contradiction. An empty space between my outstretched arms where, moments ago, an unresponsive display rack rested. Where in childhood a teddy bear lay, its arms, too, held out to the world.

Yours,

Sean

Connor—

What's this you say—a victory? *A lady?*

In your dialect, I believe one articulates such a whopping surprise thusly: *Woah*. Does that sound about right?

As sailors attest, one can never predict from whence the wind will blow, and when winds will change. And so the winds on which our correspondence have briefly sailed have changed. Our letters will be forced to take a different tack to reach their destinations. We veer off the planned course. Good, I say. Bully for us. Our correspondence will only illuminate more now that you have, ahem, *hands-on experience*, a subject on which to practice. We will discover exotic and uncharted regions of misogyny, and the thrills will be ours alone. Oh, I'm not saying it won't be a tough going—there are bound to be rough waters, bouts of scurvy, perhaps a shipwreck or two and concomitant exchanges with island savages. But our continued dedication and acute attention to the winds will ensure our success.

Speaking of when the goings get tough: as I was first reading your letter, I was passing a difficult, dense, turgid, yet eyes-crossingly pleasurable stool. It stole my attention from your prose. The passage of this stool was like

reading a poem of equal parts obscurity and sublimity—I put the work in, and I received due compensation. It was no less than spiritual travail and bliss; indeed, I believe I momentarily touched the Godhead with my colon. Afterward, standing over the bowl, I marveled at the specimen I had just gifted the world: it, itself, *was* a poem—well crafted, carved cleanly with arabesque ridgework and many intricate lacunae for the careful viewer to appreciate. I took a Polaroid.

I was, given the import of my own predicament, obviously distracted from your letter, and unable to appreciate its import. Now, a few hours later, I have settled down and stopped all self congratulation. I reread your letter, multiple times. Bully for you, Connor. Tina sounds like a grounded, self-contained young woman—a rarity today. I have no caveats, no warnings about the bliss you experience. But nor do I have any blessings, any *nihil obstats*. A relationship is immune to either. It has its own agency, independent of its parties.

Connor, I was a young man once. I know what innumerable joys wash over you. I leave you to them. The world gathers about you to inflict a gauntlet of pleasure. Birds sing for you, clouds part above your head. Follow this bliss. Enjoy this budding relationship. But keep your eyes open for any new opportunities it provides you to grow as a man and misogynist, and report back.

Sean

Connor,

Your coupling has led me down an old, revered path in my meditations—shining, as it does, a light upon my own solitude. Solitude, as Sister Wendy reminds us, is not the same as loneliness. Rainer Maria Rilke remarked that solitude is the most crucial state for a poet. I'm no poet—even if the cadences of my prose contain more poetry than most of what bric-a-brac is passed off as verse today)—but I've long held that solitude is a vital place for any party interested in improvement.

And so, without a letter from you to reply to, I have been left alone (but not lonely) to contemplate with care each thought that surfaces. I suspect that, given how much joy solitude gives me that, should I ever be cursed again with a relationship, I will miss its sterling company. Indeed, only in a relationship will I be truly lonely.

There's no escaping it, Connor: we men are solitary creatures. An *I* never becomes, truly, a *we*. We never leave our skins. Alone and naked we come into this world and receive our spanking. Alone and clothed we leave it. (Note: I have never heard of a spanking before death, but would not protest to its being added to any Last Rites administered me.)

Even though I know what joys of solitude you're missing, I wish you well with your coupling. You were, by the by, sparse with your details of Tina. Just a name and a few adjectives will not do. If you don't deliver, I will be forced to my own imaginings, and bring to mind the aging Tina Turner, who so wrongly maligned her martyred husband, Ike. Do, in your next note, tell me more: who she is, where she hails from, her dam and sire. See if you can include a full body shot, if she'll relent to one. It would be instructive, for me, to see what woman reciprocates your attentions.

Sean

Connor,

The late Alan Dugan said that the most popular mode of contemporary expression was the confessional. Poets of all stripes and qualities write the personal out of the isolation with their existence. As if to say, “Hey there, world—I exist, too.”

And so I say to you, Connor: *I'm here, too*. I'd be flattering you to equate you with a world and my isolation from you one of existential anguish. But heed this warning: if I don't hear from you soon, I will, in playful protest, begin to compose awful confessional poetry and send them to you, one a day. Perhaps I'll slip up, put the wrong address on the letter, and send it to a neighbor, or one of the “guys” you've mentioned. One gesticulates already: it concerns the awful habit of decadent men to wear breasts. The obese, with their lady flippers, and the body builders, with their pectoral protuberances.

Don't make me do it, Connor. Don't make me versify. I mean, what would Tanya think?

Yours,

Sean

Connor,

Connor?

Silence.

At first, I savored your silence. It served as a means to emphasize, and color, what “notes” had been previously sounded. I re-read our correspondence, in the meantime, looking back with equal parts nostalgia and naughtiness. Oh, we did say some untoward things, didn’t we, Connor? But how do I interpret your continued, sustained silence? Is it a sweet pause, a ripening between notes, growing all the more resonant in its accrual? No. While letter writing is itself a silent pursuit, eschewing as it does the human voice, I have nonetheless grown bored meditating on your quiet. The tune, or lack of tune, has grown old. This is no longer a musical pause, but the quiet of the dead, the dumb, the imbecile without means to make a communicative noise.

John Cage, the charlatan composer, used silence to focus his audience’s attentions on their immediate environment—the rustle of programs, labored breathing, the light whistle of a stanchéd lady fart. Is this what you

communicate, Connor, by communicating nothing? In the absence of direction, I'll take Cage up on his dumb idea, but take it a step deeper: I'll take an inventory of my own self, and meditate on what I find.

Without a letter to work on, I have been forced to find other outlets for my critical imagination. I have, at the present, no other correspondents to fill my time writing. Reading placates me only so long. My formerly rich, meditative walks in the woods by the high school lacrosse fields have grown flat and uninspired. I find myself indoors, in front of the television—that vampiric contraption, that Hoover of intellect and soul.

But just as I was about to give up, too, on television, I found a new fascination: the world of no-holds-barred, “mixed martial arts” fighting. I'm sure you've seen it, Connor—at times, in fact, I imagine you in the stands or, better, the ring! Don't you just adore how those simple brutes pound each other further into oblivion than they already were? I cheer for both of them. “Go to it, boys,” I say. “Hold nothing back.” Why does this delight me so? Why, it's nothing short of natural selection in fast forward! It's brilliant performance art, operating on modalities both high and low, deep and superficial. Fighting is, after all, the essence of all competition and performance. And so, with each punch landed, both monumental tragedy and fleeting imbecility are invoked. These are men whom I would never have for tea, who have never read Herodotus, and yet who brainlessly embody all of ancient Hellas' spirit.

I mentioned Herodotus. Have you seen the new film dramatization of the battle of Thermopylae? A must see, Connor! It multiplies the glories of cagefighting a hundred fold. The battle of nations, races, sexes—all in a single film, and easily modulated to speak of not just to history, but the day's world events. Please, Connor, in your reply, give me your impressions—I am curious what today's young men make of such a film. It is not a movie I advise taking Toni, to, though. No, drop her off at outlet stores with some shopping money and, as I did, steal off alone to a matinee. That way no one will see you and you have the entire theater to yourself, to fill with song.

Yours,

Sean

My, my, Connor—

We're in and out quick, aren't we? You could have fit that on a postcard, and comfortably, without cramping your script.

Was I foolish in expecting that, several thousand words into our correspondence, you would reply to my last letter in depth, typed, and with timeliness?

Say it ain't so, Connor!

Perhaps you can relate to my frustration: having waited years to experience a life of the flesh, you write that what you have found pales in comparison to your feverish fantasies. What's more, you perform poorly: you cannot manage anything but the swiftest intercourse, and making love should last longer than making microwave popcorn. Like this most recent letter of yours, the endeavor ends prematurely.

I can't help but take it personally. Do I bore you? Am I of so little use? Or, Connor, am I correct in diagnosing a case of what you have previously termed "hos before bros"? I suspect that I am.

There is good reason to heed such a charge. It, "Bros before hos," is an ancient prescription. The etymologists note that its opposite dictum, "Ho

before bro,” derives from the phrase, “to put the cart before the horse,” and given a translation into black jive. The undergirding moral imperative? Simply: men need each other. A male to male relationship is foundational. Only after one has been established, and firmly, can each male go out and subsequently seek a healthy relationship with his natural enemy. Men must be each other’s homes, each other’s “safe spaces.” Without the company of his fellows, a man is like a plant suspended in mid air—his roots away from soil’s nourishment. Did you not know that the Spartans, in marching off to their noble death at Thermopylae, did so in pairs, according to bonds of a friendship only death could break?

I wager that other of your male friends experience the same torment you put me through. No doubt they suppress verbalizing it—we men are notoriously buttoned up. Our shameful silence only amplifies the shame of your behavior. Connor, the next time you run across a dear friend and depart from him prematurely, to spend “quality time” with Tasha, notice the moisture collect under his eyes, and search yourself for guilt.

Sean

You little turd!

When one is delivered an indignity of extravagance, it is impossible to respond in ridicule. Such an indignity has already traveled into parody, into the absurd. I can do no better than turn your words back on you, return them for your inspection so that, hopefully, you're taken by regret:

So my girlfriend found the stack of letters. She was reading them when I came back from class and was like who is this your writing. I tried to explain but she kept going "this guy is a total skeev and sexist jerk and he's totally wants to get in your pants." She read me a thing back that I hadn't noticed it before. Dude Why are there so many butts in your letters? And then she started showing me how your wrong about what saying these things about girls and how in society today men and women are socially constructed to be how they are by the media which is run by people like you she said.

And, later, in the same interminable paragraph (ever heard of an indent, you dope?):

Anyway she's going to break up with me if she finds out I write you a letter again I'm sorry but this is going to be my last letter to you. Thank you but stop it with all that stuff about butts it was weird and makes me uncomfortable.

You have no idea how much pain it caused me to type that. And not because I bristle at Trisha's accusation that I wish to get "in your pants." Why, even if I were so inclined, I'd never go for anyone who referred to me as "dude." Connor, do not flatter yourself. If you were still in my favor I would indulge you with details of a recent dream that establishes, beyond any doubt, my predilections. It involved a certain Venus and Serena Williams, and me, *in flagrante delicto*. And believe me when I tell you, it was not going well for me. I was, you might say, losing the match. Curious for more, Connor? Tough. You will hear no more of my healthy trouncing at the hands of these two considerable young nubian athletes—you no longer deserve my elaborations.

No, it wasn't the accusation that hurt. It pained me, rather, to type up such gangrenous, wretched prose. Let alone the prefabricated and lifeless ideas contained therein like corpses in shoddily built coffins.

So, to respond! Where do I begin? And should I even? Should I encourage you to use protection in your intimate forays, as your girlfriend has obviously contracted what Professor Bloom diagnoses as the “French disease” of social constructivism? No, I won’t provide any help. Besides, we’ve covered this ground before. Long ago I gave you the intellectual armor to ward off Trisha’s flimsy volley. That you didn’t don it proves my time’s been wasted.

And as for butt stuff, I’d say you’re the expert there, judging on where your head is presently lodged. I’d help you extract it, but you’ve persuaded me to save my efforts for another backside. Besides, you’re obviously pleased with the view it affords you.

In male anger, a man is reduced first to short monosyllabic words, then not even words—phonemes, consonants, husks of sound. And then, of course, there’s fighting. And after the fighting, simply, *silence*. And that’s where your indignity bring me.

Farewell, Connor. Give your colon my regards.

In disgust,

Sean

Dear Trixie or Trudy, or Whomever—

You know me. This is Mr. Casey, your boyfriend's former tutor. I'm addressing this note to you, as I'm aware you open all Connor's mail. You like to play secretary, don't you? Good for you—it's a vocational skill that will serve you well, should you consider entering the workforce at some point.

Enclosed please find a Polaroid of a bowel movement. It was constructed, not socially, but *anally*. With my ass, Trisha. After you're through admiring it, please share it with Connor. He *adores* my BMs. Has he told you?

Sincerely,

Sean Casey

My dear Connor,

Pardon me for rooting out your parent's address and sending my note there. I just could not risk having it read and destroyed by your girlfriend.

A song on the radio today brought you to mind and tears to my eyes. Eyes, here, are doubly resonant, as the tune's singer, Stevie Wonder, lacks their use. The song was "Signed, Sealed, Delivered," Connor. Do you know how it goes? It continues, ending on an address to the lady interest: "I'm yours."

How often I end letters to you on that same note! *Yours*. How true it is! How foolish of me not to realize that, often, it's not the teacher who teaches, who attends to his student. It is not a student who belongs to, and attends, a class. No. It is the teacher, rather, who belongs to his student, and the student who attends to his master, cares for him as he runs through his pathetic pedagogical motions.

In other words: Here I am Connor—signed, sealed, delivered. Tell me: how are you? How is your relationship? What happinesses have been yours. Why? Because *I'm yours*.

Let us renew our correspondence, but this time do it differently. Let us not proceed as teacher and student, but as equals. I know, I know—a gulf of knowledge and age separate us, geography too, but I am tired of giving lessons. I wish, rather, for a more balanced correspondence. You share, I share. We both win.

I wrote of Stevie Wonder. What Wonder lacks in sight he makes up for in song. I'm no songwriter, Connor, but let this, my apology to you, make up for my lack of foresight. I should have been able to foresee what trials a relationship would bring to our continued correspondence. I'm willing make the sacrifices to ensure that we can safely and productively continue our dialogue. If it means resorting to email, fine. If I must pay for a P.O. Box where I can send you letters, that's very well. Why? Because I'm...

Yours,

Sean

My Dear Connor,

I am grieved to hear of your romance's termination. Sandra sounded like the genuine article, not prone to such shifts in affection typical of her sex. I admit, having experienced heartbreak, I know how little can console you. But, Connor, know that I stand with you in solidarity as fellow sufferer. I assure you: a break up is part of romance's natural course. A romance is never immortal; a break up can never be avoided. Our country's divorce rates attest as much. What is fated so will die, regardless of our wishes.

But, in the interest of full disclosure, I also admit that your break up makes me shiver with joy. Joy to have you back as correspondent, and joy that you might learn lessons only a first rate heartshredding can teach. You've seen just recently my shortcomings as a teacher—I may very well need the extra help!

Perhaps, since you are in so low a state, now is not a good time to begin our "relationship as equals." You need me now as an injured athlete needs his athletic trainer, as a third world country needs a firm, benevolent dictator, or as the impoverished need a doubt-proof, invincible faith. I will

apply ice to your wounds, healthcare and literacy to your impoverished parts, absolute conviction for your doubts.

I will let the healing begin by telling you about a romance wound of my own.

On relieving me of my services, a former girlfriend set about tattooing her body. On one, across a heart crowned in thorns, a banner read, "Bury your heart." The heart had wings, certainly not suitable for an organ now charged with living beneath the earth. What burrowing creature has need for wings, Connor? The air beaver?

On learning of these tattoos, I came up with one for myself. A heart on my bicep, a pile of broken arrows underneath. Across the heart, a banner: *TRUST NO BITCH*. Sometimes, Connor, one must throw subtlety into a wall.

I say all this as preface to a pat on the back. You were right in what you said to the Mormon. Truth with expletives is the only truth. We want all of the truth, not a neutered version holding a jar of its former genitals. It is not only women in their physical incarnation who seek to remove potency from men. There are female ideologies, religions, sports, institutions, all working tirelessly against the masculine. What you encountered in the Mormon was a female religious prescription. The Mormon argued for female truth, shorn of hair, soft around the hips. You told him, and I'm glad you did. You magic marked some balls on the eunuch. Edward Field's early poem "Graffiti" is instructive here; I quote its first two stanzas:

Blessings on all the kids who improve the signs in the subways:
They put a beard on the fashionable lady selling soap,
Fix up her flat chest with the boobies of a chorus girl,
And though her hips be wrapped like a mummy
They draw a hairy cunt where she should have one.

The bathing beauty who looks pleased
With the enormous prick in her mouth, declares
“Eat hair pie; it’s better than cornflakes.”
And the little boy in the Tarzan suit eating white bread
Now has a fine pair of balls to crow about.²

Your Mormon wishes such truth didn’t exist. You remind him otherwise.

Blessings on you, Connor. He cherishes a losing battle. Let him alone to lose,
triumphantly, in peace. Please: keep your Mormon barb handy. Stick it in this
couplet for safe keeping:

In what way, and with how much relish, does X deny me masculinity?
In what way, and with how much relish, will the testicles’ truth be
told?

I wrote that. But not without your intercession. Your verbal evisceration of a
Latter Day Saint was well done—was, perhaps, the one success you’ve had
under my tutelage. So the credit is mine, but also, in some small way, yours
too.

No, I decided against the tattoo. Even to consider it marks my mind
with more memory than I care to keep. A woman, Connor, may leave one’s
mattress quickly enough, but she may not be so quick to leave one’s thoughts.

² Edward Field, *Stand up, Friend, with Me* (New York: Grove Press, 1963) 49.

Yours,

Sean

Connor,

I'm all over the place. And where life has left off in wakefulness dream has picked up in sleep. Two nights ago there was an instructive nightmare. I was walking. Every tail on every woman I passed spoke to me. Beckoned. The best whistled. I was surrounded by a semantic confusion: there were braziers which were, at once, brassieres. The former contain fire; the latter hold breasts. Here they were now one and the same. Every breast, aflame, hummed in what brazier it rested, trying to escape and find me. Many did escape. Fiery bosoms flew in from all directions. I was consumed by them, and couldn't do anything but burn. Curiously, the doctor told me I died of sudden infant death syndrome, SIDS. Which I couldn't help but mistake for AIDS, as he spoke in Spanish.

I must give my mind a good archaeological scrubbing, to see where the trouble lies. I have suspicions.

I have memories, Connor, of a woman, so painful I will never be able to speak to her again. I mentioned earlier that I would not mention her again; here I am. You see how hard it is to escape paying homage to the agent of one's trauma? But contrary to reductive criticisms of my misogyny, I have not

been broken by this woman. It is as if I were made of shatter proof glass and, when struck, broke into small, rounded, harmless pieces, soared through the windshield of myself, landed in a pile of excrement, then a pile of nails and broken glass. Not tarred and feathered, shat and nailed. But “no worries,” Connor. I’m better now. Obviously.

Last night I had another scare. In the dream, it was as if I were the coyote foe of the Road Runner, ran off the cliff, but did not fall. I was held aloft, but to the third power. And it had been a couple days. I hung in mid air, but worse: I was without reference to ground or sky. I had no idea about not having ideas, and words didn’t come easy. Why? Why such terror? Because in that dream I had the distinct impression that *I was in a relationship with a woman!* Here, Connor, in my letters to you, I have celebrated, polished my loneliness, lovingly. And then, last night, in dream, *I was in a relationship with a woman. And it gave me pleasure.* Horrors!

Make of the above however you wish. I love women. I think the most sophisticated of us do. It’s that dumb misogynist who sees women as location for temporary pleasure. It should be clear to you I’m after something deeper than “dicking.”

Yours,

Sean

Connor,

I'm tempted to avoid it. It's so expected from our more cretinous colleagues that, to throttle expectations, the temptation to avoid it increases tenfold. Unfortunately, it is too true to omit. To provide a conceit for this letter I relent. Here goes.

If Osama bin Laden were a woman, he would've issued an apology for 9-11 within a week on Al Jazeera.

"I'm sorry," he'd say between sobs. "I was having my p-----d."

And mark my word, Connor: a good portion of the world's herbivorous, wheat germ liberals would forgive him.

I don't know if you're a pacifist, or believer in the morality of a just revenge. I'm of the latter camp. When one weathers the attack of crazies, to advocate peace and rationalize craziness is of equal insanity.

While they take on airs of niceness, all women advocate violence. Often I have been attacked, randomly, by women who had previously cared for me. In the apology to follow each attack, all blame is put on the woman's monthly misfortune. She had to—she was under attack! It's not her fault, it's the terrorists'! And that, Connor, is just some awful bunk. Blame must be

pinned on the person who acts, whether that person be Mohammed Atta or a woman.

Join me a moment, Connor. Hold my hand as I soar off into fancy. Into the land of *What If*. What if there were a female fundamentalism? OBL's is decidedly male, decidedly misogynist. He takes us westerners further and equates the female with negative space. His are cloistered, obscured, darkened. While I think there are distinct possibilities in treating women this way, I prefer western prejudice. Women are out where I can see them, admire their physiques, hate their varied, unique selves.

So, what would a female fundamentalism look like? I will probe this theology in three questions.

First, Connor, have you ever encountered a nun? The nunnery's our first stop for this fantasy panty raid. Each month, in nunneries across the globe, God coordinates a tsunami of menstruation across all fertile sisters. Its impact threatens the core of religious orders, tests the faith and resolve of all. It's a traumatic reminder of a sister's calling, not to God but her loins. But, instead of correcting her ways by reversing course, fleeing the cloister, and being fruitful, she compounds the offense, redoubling her anti-male celibacy, transforming the repression of her ripe loins into violence *against* the nature that calls her. In her charge at parochial schools, she finds her victims, young boys, and beats them, with and without reason, whenever possible. Fair warning, Connor: when I meet you in person I will mercilessly paddle your

bottom as Sister Mary Francis so mercilessly paddled mine. The music of your paddling, your sobbing, your pain's pitch? Consider this is the liturgical music of the *bin Ladenettes*, the female fundamentalism.

Second, Connor: have you ever met a fat woman? Oh my goodness! She plows through society all gangbusters. With nothing to lose, she rids her company of whatever it is they have. Not to take, not to eat, but to relish in the loss. She is as a vacuum, losing everything except what weight and gravity she, in person, possesses. Here, in this vicious vacuum of the fat woman, I locate another seed of the female fundamentalism. If, on a grand scale, such a lady's fundamentalism came to pass, it would be a sustained state of loss, a hell without fire, hell without hell. The Bible of the female fundamentalism will begin not with a Genesis, but with a creation's undoing. I know you can't picture it. I can't either. I suppose that's "the point."

I can only bring myself to scratch the surface of this awful iceberg. But don't you feel something, Connor? Something strange? That's respect—respect for woman's awful power. And one to which you should attend lest you underestimate it and, sometime in the future, fall its victim. Attend to it.

Sean

Connor,

You may be a rube—your loud, dependable, percussive behavioral flatulence announces as much—but you’re a rube with a few surprises left. Yes, my dear, there’s always civic involvement—lobbying, letters to elected officials, peaceful protest. On what the elect do with our words and sentiments we only speculate, but the effort certainly should have consequence.

There have been only brief flirtations of our kind with government. One recalls the 1802 Barbie Tax, and what wonders that bill would have worked on society if it weren’t repealed in the next legislative breath. Imagine, Connor—women taxed for their femininity, men for their swishiness! I am left in breathless, hypothetical repose by what beautiful citizenry such legislation would have shaped.

I just ate my modest bachelor’s dinner in the most *classy* of ways—in front of the television. But by grace, Connor, a program of woman’s professional basketball happened upon me. As I forked macaroni into my mouth, I imagined my body their court; they massaged me with their feet and fouls, and released from me my own fouls and woes. I was improved,

Connor, by their athleticism and purpose, and almost seasoned my steamed kale with tears. If only the Barbie Tax stood sentinel over society, were given decades to do its good work, the country would spill over with such majestic women, who would all be rewarded a healthy tax refund for their beauty.

More recently, unfortunately, one of our kind in Pennsylvania, more the knucklehead than you, fashioned legislation to exact a federal vagina ban. Howsoever delicious in theory, the practicalities of such a prohibition were impossible—coexistence with womankind will ever be our lot, no matter how many share our chagrin. We can say that the young congressman's heart was in both the right and most wrong of places. The bill backfired legislatively and personally. A woman challenged his seat during midterm elections, and won. He and his own set of indubitably male genitals were banished from the capitol.

You desire an assignment. I'm afraid no amount of homework will substitute for talent, just as no amount of ear training can give one perfect pitch. But I haven't the heart to stick a fork in you yet. Besides, despite my hope otherwise, there's always hope, even for you. Certainly, call your senators, urge them to bring back the Barbie Tax. Then look up the proposed vagina ban, and report back. I'm curious as to what happened to the representative behind it; my suspicion is you'll find no record of his ever having existed—except, perhaps, a jar of his genitals on display at the

Smithsonian. If you feel fear, Connor, that's simply me writing an A on your progress report.

Sean

Connor,

Shit.

I had to read this twice, and not because I was, as before, wrestling a stubborn stool:

Last night I got drunk and called my ex. (Her name is Tina by the way.) I started out all angry yelling at her some stuff I think you'd like. But she was crying and instead of yelling back she just said I understand I'm sorry. Then We talked for like three hours. I told her I forgave her. She said she forgave me. Honestly I'm not even sure what we were forgiving each other for. Does That ever happen to you? Anyway we're going to meet for tea tomorrow, there's this meditation yoga retreat for friends who are going through trouble times. I think it might be good for us even if we don't stay together to help us stay good friends. Do you stay friends with your exes, Sean?

Well. That just about says everything I need to know, doesn't it?

Please, Connor, keep a hold of this letter, and in future years meditate on that foul excerpt above. I expect it may take you fifteen years to realize how monstrously dumb that paragraph is. No, maybe twenty years. But it will be well worth it to come to that realization.

I hate to be coarse, Connor, and I hate to pass judgment on you. You've been a loyal, if awful, student. But I repeat: *Shit*. Have I really wasted my time on someone prone to such Guinness World Record breaking feats of idiocy?

Despite my belief in impermanence, I think you'll agree we've reached an unbreachable impasse. My tutelage, my letters, my intellect off the leash, your apparent understanding—it's been for naught. You've shown no transfer from theory to practice. I would go on writing you, Connor, but it would be for my own jollies. Why bother with postage? A professor does not lecture to an empty hall.

I entered into correspondence so that it might edify. You had chosen a pursuit, and wished to develop its skills. And I wished to help. But what if it isn't you who chooses, but you who are chosen? Instead of a career or job here, we're touching something deeper, a vocation. A miserable one, but still. Your vocation in life may be to a misogyny of all thumbs. Even those with a lousy lot have had that lot bequeathed them for a reason. It is, apparently, your moral imperative to lose your small battle of the sexes, and lose with

gusto. That which propels you forward is that which causes you pain, and there's no evading it. The cycle cannot be broken—that is a gift given to your more sophisticated colleagues. To them you will be a reference point, a valuable lesson. "Don't do that," a mentor will caution his charge. "That's what Connor did."

Then, you ask, what to do? There isn't much, Connor. You will have your regrettable encounters, orgasms you'll be too drunk to enjoy. There will be voluminous admissions to friends who will shrug if they are smart, validate if they're not. You will live. You will be a martyr of sorts, though without the dignity and release of a noble, early death. And one day, without ceremony, you will die. I hope that last point's not news.

I may, I admit, be off. I extend to you the right to rub any future success "up in my face." It is possible, though remote, that you operate at a higher level than I—we share a time zone, yes, but we don't share, say, an *experience* zone—and communication is impossible. There is, in all arts, the concept of negative space—that which is left empty, asserted by its own absence. And so with misogyny: negative behavior, what's not enacted. Perhaps you've been busy with negative behavior. If that's the case, then it is you who have written the following letters to me with your silence and obstinacy. And I, your unwitting pupil, owe you my thanks.

Sean

P.S.

I have included in this envelope a small Tupperware container. Once Tina finishes the procedure, ask her (nicely) to put your testicles inside, close the lid, and put the container in the freezer. This way, should you have second, you may have yourself re-manned.

Connor,

Then nothing I write won't roll off your back. Super. We're back where we started. No, further back than that. This just in, from Marcel Proust:

If he was so cold towards me, while making himself so agreeable to my grandmother, this did not perhaps arise from any personal antipathy, for in general, to the extent that he was kindly disposed towards women, of whose faults he spoke without, as a rule, departing from the utmost tolerance, he displayed towards me, and especially young men, a hatred so violent as to suggest that of certain misogynists for women.

Dwell for a moment on the hatred we men have for our fellows. We're at a sports bar—the game's over, the drinking's heavy. The fight or flight instinct pounds in our minds and loins. We scan the room for enemies. The provocative, perverse flirtation leads to fist fights. The sizing up, not for sex, but for violence. I, one brute says, could *take* that guy. Indeed.

At the root of all this? Competition for the woman? Perhaps. But my sense is this is a concern that does not need a woman in its equation. This is, truly, a “guy thing.”

I’ll take it one further Connor, and be blunt about it. I’ve got these barroom “meathead” feelings for you. It is nothing like the mystical, omnidirectional hatred I have for guess who. My hatred of men is particular, surgically precise. I’ve got about a paragraph’s worth of sympathy left in me.

My mother would, upon stubbing her toe, take the chance to channel physical sensation, pain, into an emotion, anger, at me. And so I to you, my dear boy. My affections for you are no longer. I say attach your ineptitude to someone else.

Here’s how it happened. Today, as I showered, I examined the nuance of my distaste for you. I found that I hated the way you move through the world, the way you talk, the way you write. I hated the way you hate. I began ruminating on how best to pawn you off. I thought, first, I should pawn you off on some unsuspecting gentleman. My college friend—and former colleague at *The Dartmouth Review*, Lucius Wexler, perhaps. But, then, I had an epiphany. I had my workman’s gloves on, had worked up a good lather—one might say an excessive lather—prepping to clean my perineum. And then—clunk!: my head hit the showerhead and clarity was mine. I made an exclamation through this pain. I yelled, and with curious certainty, an

unclean word, Connor. It was not your usual *damn* or *sugar*. Its six, awful letters started as a command, but ended as a question.

I did not know from whence the word came (it is not a word in my active vocabulary), but knew immediately what to do with it, and you. So here's the plan Connor: apprentice yourself to a faggot. A real one. A true blue sodomite. One of *them*, one of *those*. I apologize to you, Connor. Contrary to what Tsarina might tell you, I don't have what it takes. I am as advanced a misogynist as my sexual preference allows. Somewhere, inside me, is still that tragic attraction to women. Oh, would that I were a sodomite, and freed from this misery! Oh, to be a sodomite—to hate, and only hate! Alas, no. I can do no more for you. You need the sodomites now. Nobody loathes women like them. Nobody knows women better; nobody has so little to lose. And nobody is, coincidentally, loved by them more. Theirs is, also, an aesthetic which has never heard of subtlety. Perhaps they've heard of you. Find one who's sour on women but sweet on young men with a "hard on" for losing. And when you find him, give him my regards, and maybe even my address. I'm sure he'll need some support, and I'd appreciate learning the future of your failing, at a remove of course. But as for you and me, Connor, we're both each other's history, and thank God for it. I regard you here, and conclusively.

Sean Casey

THE PRIVATE SECTOR

I spent the better part of last Sunday fellating myself.

I should qualify that.

The day began with that most generous of times, the AM. I awoke early and shivered with the day's possibilities. Ordinarily I make good use of the morning, invigorating myself by reading scripture. But Sunday I foolishly squandered this productive time by taking exercise. I did so vigorously. Had I known the exercise which would exhaust my afternoon, I would not have gone on such a jog, challenging myself with such steep inclines; nor would I have run with such immoderate vim. But no: I pounded up the steepest hills of Belmont, Massachusetts. On my jog, I passed many reflective surfaces—car and store windows, puddles—and these surfaces yielded stunning images of my body in motion. The more reflections I saw, the more labored my exercise became. After the tenth tempting, full-bodied reflection I grew inhibitably aroused and could run no further. To relieve tension, I ensconced myself in the bushes next to the Bruegger's Bagel on Goodenough Street and rubbed out a feverish masturbation.

As my constituents know, I'm not only governor, but Mormon. I intend, through my conduct, to educate Americans about Mormonism, a faith whose splendor is often closeted by its adolescent fondness for being furtive and weird. I'm sure some skeptics and anti-Mormons out there are scoffing,

“But Mr. Governor, what does sneakily ensconcing oneself in bushes and rubbing out a feverish masturbation have to do with Mormonism?” It’s a good question, and I’m going to answer it: *a lot*. One of my favorite Mormon outreach activities is, in fact, public masturbation. It illustrates a little known tenet of the faith: masturbation is a big no-no *except* when outdoors, when public, and the act’s shame is celebrated.

I emerged from the bushes, crimson, slippery to the touch, duly pooped and deliciously guilty, and realized what a mistake I had made. After running with immoderate vim, masturbating feverishly was doubly foolish, taking me past exhausted, all the way to spent. Just how would I perform my governor’s duties, let alone the mammoth job I did not yet know I would task myself?

Returning home, I showered and, forgoing clothing, sat down to nude breakfast. As I ate, my wife prepared my coiffure.

My wife, who is a woman, is prohibited by Mormon edict from speaking any word containing eight or more letters. This has nothing to do with sexism, and a whole lot to do with Mormon female pedagogical doctrines which I am prohibited from detailing. But I want to reassure skeptics of my faith that our prohibition of female education and pronunciation does not prevent a woman from realizing her potential as wife, hair stylist, mother, male pleasure provider, and cook. “Breakfast” and

“coiffure” both have at least eight letters and, prohibited as she is from pronouncing those words (or expressing opinions in general), my wife is nonetheless adept at the making of what food and hair they signify.

She is, clearly, a wonderful wife. This talk isn't about her, of course. But I'm going to add a bit more about her to give you a sense of my superb taste in ladies. My wife is pretty good at tennis. I still own her big time on the court, but she can beat our sons most days. She also holds a black belt in Mormon Pleasure Provision, and has reached high levels of attainment in over thirty Mormon pleasure procedures, including The Deep Sweden, The Hopeless Filibuster, and The Curious Peruvian. In addition, my wife has all those characteristics non-Mormon wives have: a body, a name, and thoughts of her own. None of these, however, will be detailed, by her or by me, ever. Our faith prohibits both description of women and women's expression. If, for instance, my wife's name is ever leaked to the press, or if more than 40% of her body is captured in a photograph, or if she proclaims any opinion whatsoever, dire consequences result, for her and for me. In any of those instances, I would be forced to gather my 1st and 2nd cousins, tie my wife to the picnic table in the backyard, eviscerate her to a live soundtrack of smooth jazz, and drag her to the tabernacle for official ablution. And that would suck for me because if I did that, I wouldn't have a wife anymore.

My family is so flipping important to me. Without my family, I would not be a family man, and only family men are elected governor, and mainly governors are elected president, and I think I want to be president. I do not think everyone should be a family man or president, though. I believe in denying the rights of governance, of being a family man, and of reproduction, to brunettes, the non-white, sodomites, and the mentally slow.

In the interests of fairness and full disclosure, I should mention that this prohibition hits home. It includes my teenage son, Rudy, who you probably haven't heard of until now. Rudy is good kid and, like his father, intensely handsome. But his is a tragic handsomeness, for despite the pretty face, he is a brunette with an IQ less than 80 and, in keeping with my feelings regarding brunettes of low IQ and the strictures of my career ambitions, Rudy is kept in the back porch, where he eats, sleeps, takes his meals, and does pretty much everything else in a utility bucket my wife empties every third day.

From the rearing of Rudy, I have discerned harsh truths about life. When my wife was pregnant with Rudy and the doctor told us he was a brunette with an IQ less than 80, I wanted to abort him, and pronto. Rudy inspired in me, for the first time, an enthusiasm for a woman's right to choose. But my father-in-law put up a stink, and so Rudy lives.

After jog, breakfast, and fixing of coiffure, I adjourned to the rec room to check my email. I threw my moist jogging suit in the washer, and was bending to sit in the computer chair when the floor-to-ceiling mirror found me. One gulp my own physical expanse and—*thwunk!*—I was atomically aroused. I raised a coy eyebrow at myself and my Mormon Maker followed, rearing up, anxious to search out converts.

Given how spent I was, having just completed an aerobic jog and anaerobic, feverish masturbation, you can imagine how attractive I must be to give myself yet another erection, a nuclear one at that, and the energy to, again, do something about it.

What happened next is blurred from lust and the fact that I lost consciousness partway through. I closed the door and shut the blinds. I jumped back in the computer chair and coiled up. No dice. I failed in four subsequent chair positions before trying the sofa. My sofa poses showed promise, but each time as I neared Flavor Country, I lost balance and toppled off. Eventually, I stayed on the floor, scooted to the wall, and wedged myself. I was getting close when, from beyond the generous bulk of my genitals, upside down, I saw Rudy.

My first thought was, “Who let Rudy out of the porch?”

My second thought was, “I can make use of Rudy to fellate myself.”

My third thought, which I verbalized, was, “Rudy, come help your father with a private matter.”

Rudy, being slow, was slow to take instruction. He continued to stare, marveling, most likely, at my flexibility.

“Rudy, grab Dad’s ankles!”

After hesitation, he did.

“That a boy. Lower Dad’s ankles to the ground. Slowly, now—Dad doesn’t want to rip a hammy.”

That dummy: he did the opposite, lifting my ankles up, and quickly.

“Down, Rudy! Pretend Dad’s one of the newspapers he rolls up to hit you with.”

This worked.

“Ok, keep them there. Dad’s going in.”

Miraculously, I did. I got ahold of myself, mouthily, and began to give myself the business. For the first time in my life I worked my own terrific, muscled length. It was hard, it was mine, and it was awesome. The veins of my love muscle, pulsing in the rhythms of a rave’s ‘drum n bass,’ criss-crossed the shaft, spelling out words in a cursive form of brail. Fortunately, I was fluent in this Braille only extant on the skin of my warrior. Let me go ahead and translate for you. On my penis it is written: “The owner of this monument is the most attractive, important, and intelligent Mormon ever. Congratulations on making his intimate acquaintance.”

That’s pretty neat, huh?

Doing myself became quite the abdominal workout: the motion to fellate was the most intense of crunches. Some of you might object, saying, “Mr. Governor, you already have a really cut six pack. Why do more crunches?” To which I reply, “That’s true, but one can always use additional tone.”

Unfortunately, my level of arousal dictated an anaerobic pace; I worked manically, took no time to rest, and cramps soon began a protest throughout my lower torso. Uncowed, I stayed the course. After the first thirty minutes, some pain ebbed. In the resulting second wind, I transferred my skill set from the private sector to the endeavor. And when, twenty minutes later, the pain did return, my private sector know-how gave me what I needed to work through the conflict.

Another half hour passed.

“Dad,” Rudy said. “You are purple.”

I popped myself out.

“You’re flipping correct I’m purple, Rudy,” I huffed. “Although there is a magenta here, and there, bright fuchsia.”

In truth, I had trouble seeing anything at all. I was tempted to tell Rudy my Mormon Maker was, in fact, ultraviolet and consequently off the visible spectrum—when, most likely, I was low on oxygen—but I refrained: I wanted my monument back in my mouth pronto, and Rudy wouldn’t have understood the joke anyway.

I got back on.

Heartened, and feeling more than a little cocky (if you know what I mean), I began to incorporate moves from “Woodworking 101,” the instructional video I had bought for my wife. To her credit, my wife had been assiduous in studying that tape, and put its techniques to use. But, in all honesty, it turned out I was much better than she at this carpentry.

And so the hours passed. Despite my formidable skills, it was a hard going.

Over the course of my adventure, there were peaks and valleys, summits and plummets. Ecstasy blossomed and yielded to severe abdominal pain. Hope met abjection, faith embraced faith’s absence. There was also a forty five minute period I cannot account for, when I was passed out for lack of oxygen. But on coming to I attacked my now flaccid friend with renewed vengeance, and put in another solid hour.

And then, the moment the world’s been waiting for.

Within what likely took only a second, eons unfurled. The cosmos, or at least the floor of the rec room, shook. A roar of a million lions sounded from my soaked perineum. My anus became a mammoth subwoofer. Its industrial strength bass levitated me. Everything within 20 feet felt my woofer. Like a sledgehammer wrapped in pillow, it attacked the room;

everything silently broke. (It was none too comfy for me, either, and nearly broke my pelvis.)

My man monument opened fire. My priceless genetic material shot from me with such force it punctured, cleanly, the side of my mouth and then the rec room wall. (I later learned the ejaculate soared out from the house, only halting in its grand trajectory when it hit Jarrod, my neighbor's obese son, right on the button, knocking him out cold, and removing from him his sense of smell.)

In other words, my citizens: your governor arrived.

(Side note: In so arriving, I accidentally kicked Rudy in the throat.

Then I followed up, purposefully, with a series of rabbit punches and shower of elbow drops. Despite subsequent attempts to stand, Rudy repeatedly fell to the floor in honor of my triumph.)

After arrival, I spent a luxurious hour spooning myself, and indulged in a Mormon cigarette.

When fully cuddled, I jumped to my feet and turned to look into the full body mirror. Unfortunately, the blood previously below the belt rose to my head, hard. I lost consciousness. When I regained consciousness, I jumped to my feet, successfully this time, and within minutes came to several realizations. First, I realized that this afternoon of fellatio was the greatest athleto-spiritual accomplishment of my already accomplished life. Second, I

gained a renewed appreciation for Rudy. I realized that despite his having brown hair and an IQ lower than 80, he was of worth. His contribution to my afternoon's pleasure convinced me that all life is sacred, even his, and that I must reconsider my stance on abortion. So now, in addition to being a pro at fellatio, I'm also pro-life.

But most importantly, I've come to realize the importance of myself.

While I believe Oprah was correct when she noted that the first person to love is yourself because no one is more important than you, I take Winfrey a step further: I am so flipping important, I am more important to all of you people than you are to yourselves.

My dear citizenry, this afternoon labor reinforced my resolve to run for the presidency. Indeed, what America needs now is a man with a wealth of experience in the private sector. Have I not just convinced you, as I've convinced myself, that that man is me?

* * *

A note, in closing, on the superior quality of my seed. My seed was of a nutritional density heretofore unprocessed in the annals of human digestion. Fact: since swallowing my seed one week ago, I have eaten nothing, nor have I felt the faintest hunger. If only I could produce a reservoir of this, my genetic material, for my fellow countrymen—not only for

reproduction, and a strengthening of our people's genetic pool, but also for national nutrition, to ensure the virility and constitution of all citizens.

Alas, I am but one amazing man, and have but a limited quantity of seed to spill for my country. But I promise you: I will see what I can do. I will, from this day forward, not only run for president, but also produce, and quickly have cryogenically frozen, as much of my superior seed as I can possibly coax from my awesome testicles.