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How I Spent My Summer Vacation: Three Essays on Place and Meaning

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HOW I SPENT MY SUMMER VACATION:
THREE ESSAYS ON PLACE AND MEANING

A Thesis
Presented to the
Department of English
Brigham Young University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Reed Evan Richards
April 1984
This Thesis by Reed Evan Richards, is accepted in its present form by the Department of English of Brigham Young University as satisfying the thesis requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

G. Eugene England, Committee Chairman

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Acknowledgements and Dedications

The efficient cause thanks his material cause, his mom, who paid for the trip, and who deserves to be thanked for many things. Formal causes and father figures include Montaigne, Browne, Emerson, Eugene England, Steven Walker, and Roy Bird. All had a hand in the shaping. I like to think that there is some other final cause than just the need to get it over with because I don't especially care to thank whoever came up with all the rules, regulations, and red tape we quixotically call graduate school. But I guess in the meantime, thanks a lot, all of you, whoever you are. You made me do it.

As to dedications, "Disney as Dreamer" is dedicated to my family, especially Mom, Jill, and Paul, and especially Jill. You can get away with dedicating something to your family because they'll think it's great no matter what. But it somehow seems presumptuous for an unproved writer to go on dedicating things to people outside of immediate family as if they should be pleased or grateful for it. "A Pilgrimage to the Mormon Shrines at Illinois and Missouri" is strongly felt and is meant to be more than it is, and if it had a dedicatee, the dedicatee would be Roy Bird.
Our whole lives ought to be spent in traveling this road. We ought to begin early. This should be the first concern, when persons become capable of acting. When they first set out in the world, they should set out on this journey. And we ought to travel on with assiduity. It ought to be the work of every day. We should often think of our journey's end; and make it our daily work to travel on in the way that leads to it. He who is on a journey, is often thinking of the destined place; and it is his daily care and business to get along; and to improve his time to get towards his journey's end. Thus should heaven be continually in our thoughts; and the immediate entrance or passage to it, viz. death, should be present with us. We ought to persevere in this way as long as we live....

All other concerns of life, ought to be entirely subordinate to this. When a man is on a journey, all the steps he takes are subordinated to the aim of getting to his journey's end. And, if he carries money or possessions with him, it is to supply him in his journey. So we ought wholly to subordinate all our other business, and all our temporal enjoyments, to this affair of travelling to heaven.

--Jonathan Edwards, "The Christian Pilgrim"
Come let us take another's words and change the meaning,
Come let us take another's meaning, change the words,
Rebuild the house that Adam built, with opals,
Redecorate Eve's bedroom. We were born
With words, but they were not our words, but others',
Smacked of the kitchen, or of gods, or devils,
Worn and stained with the blood of centuries,
The sweat of peasants, the raw gold of kings.
Shall we be slaves to such inheritance?
No; let us sweep these skeleton leaves away,
Blow them beyond the moon; and from our anger,
Our pride, our bitterness, our sweetness too,
And what our kidneys say, and what our hearts,
Speak with such voice as never Babe heard;
And bring the curtain down on desolation.
Was this rich tongue of ours shaped by our mothers?
Has it no virtue of its own? says nothing
Not said before at church or between sheets?
Must Shakespeare, with his phrase for the stormed heaven,
Hot midnight veined with lightning, babble only
Such mother's milk as one time wet his cheek?
Then let's be dumb: Walk in the little garden:
Watch the wise thrust delight as once in Egypt;
And hear the echoes of Thermopylae.

And this is peace; to know our knowledge known;
To know ourselves but as old stones that sleep
In God's midstream of wreckage, worn as smooth.
All's commonplace; the jewel with the rest.
The demon truth, sharp as a maggot, works
His destined passage through the Absolute.

--Conrad Aiken, "Preludes for Memnon," 37
The sky of religions is a ceiling. It ends the world. It is a ceiling and screen, since, in escaping from my heart, the aspirations are not lost; they are revealed against the sky, and I thinking myself lost, find myself in them or in the images of them projected on the ceiling. Abhorring the infinite, religions imprison us in a universe as limited as the universe of prison--but as unlimited, for our hope in it lights up perspectives just as sudden, reveals gardens just as fresh, characters just as monstrous, deserts, fountains; and our more ardent love, drawing greater richness from the heart, projects them on the thick walls; and this heart is sometimes explored so minutely that a secret chamber is breached and allows a ray to slip through, to alight on the door of a cell and to show God.

--Jean Genet, The Miracle of the Rose
Joseph Smith, 27 Nov. 1832—

"Oh, Lord, when will the time come when Brother William, Thy servant, and myself, shall behold the day that we may stand together and gaze upon eternal wisdom engraved upon the heavens, while the majesty of our God holdeth up the dark curtain until we may read the round of eternity, to the fullness and satisfaction of our immortal souls? Oh, Lord, deliver us in due time from the little, narrow prison, almost as it were, a total darkness of paper, pen and ink;--and a crooked, broken, scattered and imperfect language."

--from a letter to William W. Phelps
Disney as Dreamer

Now you can visualize anything your mind can fantasize!
---Walt Disney

It is a disheartening thing that adventure should become a pursuit so institutionalized and ingrown that the only spectacle that is perhaps something a little more than quaint is the adventure seekers themselves and the only danger is being slowly trampled by crowds. If you take a picture here you may not be focussing on the tourists, but you will certainly not be focussing on the place. Call it a picture of the experience of Disneyworld, but there is no experience, no Disneyworld, without us here--just a lot of unconvincing buildings and structures--unconvincing unless you have a lot of people near them looking convinced. The best picture of the Disneyworld experience is a picture of thousands of pairs of feet moving determinedly to Futureworld or Fantasyland or Adventureland, thousands of tanned thighs, sunburnt, sweaty necks, a look of painful hilarity on the face of an anonymous middle-American, a colorful pair of Bermuda shorts gliding past in the air.
Postcard from Daytona Beach

At a convenience store in Daytona Beach everyone went in while I put gas in the van. A gray-blue, unwaxed Camaro pulled up on the other side of the pumps. Its radio was playing the kind of boulder-brain heavy rock teens on ludes listen to, but the volume was down. Two surfers, bleached and burned to an early middle age, breezed out. A high tide, it seemed; here was the ocean and its debris several blocks inland, the American coastline's tattered fringes unraveling. They were no more than a part of the tropical ocean weather--wet, salty hot breeze and green shade, mildew and rust, wrinkles in a smooth, empty sky. Brine-, barbiturate-, and beer-washed clean inside and out. Just more tropical vegetation. Smiles and greetings.

"Utah! That's a long drive! How long did it take you?"

"About three-and-a-half days to Birmingham. We've been sightseeing since that."

"Where did you go? What do you think of Florida?"

"I like Florida a lot. We've been to Panama Beach and down through Central Florida and to . . ."

"Panama Beach isn't much."

"Well, there's no surf and the humidity's . . ."

"You staying here at Daytona Beach very long? Panama Beach, that's some hillbilly's idea of an ocean. Hey! You're not going to leave without going to Disneyworld are you? It's the funnest place in the world. You can't come all the way from Utah."

"No, of course not. We wouldn't come this far without seeing Disneyworld."
"Hey! Florida's a great place! Best place in the world, isn't it? You didn't pick the best time of year weather-wise. Have you got a map? I'll show you the best way to get to Disneyworld. And Cypress Gardens, that's real close so you don't want to miss that."

Pride of place makes the natives, especially the adopted natives who dominate Florida's coast, see strangers as stupid and lucky, as if we made a fortuitous wrong turn on our way to California. And if Disneyworld were the funnest place in the world, these guys would be living in Orlando and not on the coast. They're not the type to settle for second funnest. We, on the other hand, have the right to think Disneyworld is the greatest if we want to. I don't want to. I can't. Born and bred desert dwellers know the value of withheld pleasure, the pleasure that banality induces by coming to an end sometimes. Disneyworld is a paradigm for the folly of single-mindedness in the pursuit of sensation. Not everybody was born knowing these things. Not these college dropout, mid-Sixties Elvis beach party holdovers. This friendly debris.

"I've never been to Utah. That's cowboy country. I was going to ask if you're a Mormon, but they don't believe in modern conveniences like vans and that, do they? Are you a Mormon? Do you ever see any cowboys? Know any?"

Any cowboys? You don't think about it, but those farmers and rednecks and truckers and miners and steelworkers and teenagers tearing up and down the roads, up to the canyons and down to the lake, and drinkers and smokers and drug addicts in crackerbox houses and Wendover gamblers and county fair rowdies and carnies and people
getting sick drunk on Ferris wheels at rodeo concessions—they all must be what used to be cowboys. They aren't much like Matt Dillon and Miss Kitty, or even Monte Walsh or Calamity Jane. Everyone these days is full of sentiments and attitudes and opinions (and full of other things, too!), but none have proper values like Barbara Stanwyck did in "The Big Valley" or John Wayne did in all his pictures, the values Gene Autrey and Roy Rogers and the Sons of the Pioneers sang about. Nowadays, the rednecks listen to sad songs about adultery and crime sung by the likes of Mel Tillis and Merle Haggard. The kids go for heavy metal. They don't give a gol-darn about going' over the next ridge to help a friend, or barin' their fists to protect a lady's honor, or bein' home on the range, wherever and whatever that is.

They just do whatever they want to do, and most of the time they're up to no good. They might like you or they might hate you, but if they hate you it is without cause and without appeasement, so you better stand out of their way. Once this cowboy was going to kill me with his bare hands because I was a wimp. He was drinking, I was clean-cut and sober, playing in the band in this bar, and the drunker he got the more he hated me. I don't know how I got out of that one. I guess I was lucky. Maybe he was the wimp.

At the Belair in Price hippies sold drugs while cowboys danced to our band's versions of Charlie Pride and Johnny Cash. One of our staples was that self-satisfied, hokey "Okie from Muskogee," followed up by something like a limping "Mr. Tamborine Man" or a jogging "Shambala." The cowboys were gradually becoming acquainted with the mellow joy of acid and beer. The hippies were learning to treat their
women rough in public and to wear pointy-toed cowboy boots. Two strains of the Wild West had begun to converge.

There is a lot of pain involved with being a cowboy or with being a blot on a cowboy's landscape. Ask their women. They like it. People don't expatriate themselves from somewhere else to become cowboys the same way they do to become surfers or ski bums. Those who drift into it from elsewhere were actually born to the ethos and in some way predestined to find their way to the submerged population to which they are mysteriously and unavoidably bonded. It's the ambience, the aura. When they sense it on however faint a breeze from however great a distance they are drawn, they go and fall in place. It's karma. Like the woman up the street from where I live. She is from Ohio, but you would never know it to hear her drawl. She is married according to some definition and her husband is not such a jerk, but they have separate nights out on the town at the same bar. She always looks beat up. She goes with her friends once a week (so she says, but I think it is more often) and gets drunk and stomps to that good old Country-and-Western with other cowboys looking to spend stuporous, sweaty nights one at a time with women who don't care about much and who from the looks of them don't have much choice beyond a certain low level of looks and intelligence whose bed they will groan and suppurate in. She tries to kill herself every so often. The only people she has to encourage her not to are friends just like her. Somebody once reported her to welfare because she beats her kids horribly and her house is filthy with lice, cockroaches, and cat turds. Made her hoppin mad. I know who it was.
Well, cowboys are desert-dwellers and they take a lot of pain with their pleasure. That makes their lives some kind of poetry. But as to surfers, walking and breathing surf and dying of skin cancer before they've even had a chance to drown, it is inconceivable that it would ever occur to them to trivialize their hedonism with poetry. It is neither because they know so little nor know so much that they have proceeded beyond into a crashing silence of thought hardly disturbed by a little bit of sun-worshipping small talk. They just have. Whether they have found chaos or transcendence hardly matters. I envy them somehow.

And then there are those drawn by an intense, impossible nostalgia to alternatives they will never have the right or nerve to choose—laughter and loud music from shiny cars parked with their doors open at the edges of fields on bright, late-summer days; on the road Freedom; sherbet on Carribean terraces and embraces so sweet and full it brings tears to your eyes to imagine them; anonymity, disappearance from all the people and knowledge and responsibilities that nail one's feet to the crumbling earth where one stands. There are those whose best friendships are always somewhere else, who want to live in paradise but for whom paradise is what it is simply because they don't have the guts to take one step further, to sprint across the rutted, empty fields to where the shiny car's doors wait open for them. They will not fall in place. They never turn their backs on the gulf separating them from their desires, but they grow a little bitter. I am one of those.

It is good to travel. It is even good to travel alone. Once on
a nine-day drift in Los Angeles I received aid from a man who lived in Watts. This is how I came to be friends with three of four people with whom ordinary circumstances would not have been able to convince me I had anything in common. The same went for them. I was too naive to be amazed but they were not. Leaving was a little sad. I had to come home. This trip through the South was filled with private excursions of the mind; but mere thought, even the most vivid dreaming, bars the possibility of arrival at any sort of destination except the starting point. There is no escape from the journey mode, the tourist class fantasizing. I want to get somewhere and stay. But I am always where I am. I'm waiting for something to happen. I don't think it ever will.
Now you can visualize anything your mind can fantasize!

--Walt Disney

First attempt. (Do not read this attempt. It is only a joke.)

What would my mind do without me? Our relationship is intimate. We seem to depend a great deal upon each other, me and my mind. It is difficult to decide, however, whether it is I or my mind that incepts, whether, since I do the visualizing, the visual image precedes the fantasy (a fantasy can be much more elaborate than a mere image), or whether the fantasy precedes the image (in which case the fantasy must be purely abstract, linguisting possibly, an impossible narrative, a story with pictures). A reversal of the original understanding of Disney's subtle statement makes this impossible to determine. What Disney seems to say is an original compatibility between my mind and me (in my primeval obtuseness I really believe this but Walter only pretends to) actually turns out even more basically to be an antagonism. If you contemplate this, think, "My mind and I are polarized, and do not mix even as well as oil and water," and contemplate your contemplation, you will discover the truth of my point (or my mind's point). To which part does my command at first appeal? And which part intercepts the impulse and brings it to conscious activity? Or have I got the pattern right at all? Do things really work this way? They must. They do because Disney said so--not that he's the authority, but if language allows the distinction, then the moment it does so the distinction comes into being and must be grappled with with more language and brought to some
semblance of order. Maybe Disney is the expert; his word has brought many things new into the world. If I settle the question of inception favoring either my mind or me, I have no way of knowing which originated the settling of the matter, and whether the originator (which has first, remote say) or the interceptor (which has final say) most powerfully or conclusively presents its conclusion, or if, no matter whether it is the mind or me that originates (assuming the originator to be the more powerful of us two, or even assuming the interceptor, the more direct communicator, to be more powerful, in which case it should read above, "no matter whether it is the mind or me that intercepts and communicates"), whichever one it is is in any way prejudiced in such a way as to favor itself in giving precedence, in stating itself as the originator if that's the one it wants to be, or the more powerful, whichever one that is. (Consider further: Does the originator originate the interceptor or is it even possible that the interceptor originates the originator to give itself something to intercept?) Say my mind comes up with the fantasy and I ask it, "Did you come up with this before the image that Walt Disney and I both think that I came up with and not you?" No matter what my mind answers, how will I know it is true? Does my mind have it in for me? You may object: "Why don't you ask yourself the question since you are in a much better position, skeptical as you are of your mind, to know whether you are lying or telling the truth than you are to know the same thing of your mind?" I can only reply, "If I already don't know, what good is asking me going to do? If I am hiding something from myself, I must have a reason not to reveal it. Just asking the
question isn't going to make me relent and tell the truth, is it? Even if I do relent and tell the truth, how do I know that whatever the answer is, it isn't the mind once again misleading me? If it is the more powerful, it may hogtie and gag me at will or overshout me and lie for its own gain and try to take a greater portion of the ego than is its due (but of course, being stronger, whatever portion it can obtain is its due)." Or a greater portion of the Id, I'm not sure which. What I am sure of is that the superfluous superego is not involved in the struggle. That wimp puts its face to the public, cleans up and explains what it has to to make everything look all right while, hidden from view, my mind and I circle each other fangs bared. Someone (I can't say I--that is only half of it) is dreaming.
Second attempt

Without me my mind wouldn't know what it cannot see. Then where would it be? When it travels alone it goes blindly, bumping into itself, that is to say, colliding with objects created by the imagination. Treading on its own heels, it gropes toward the thing that precedes it. It wishes it could visualize the way other lonesome travelers like you and me see ourselves in the leaves of the baobab tree and hear our own voices in the silence of the giraffe.

Without my mind I would have nothing to look at. I may see but when I close my eyes there will be nothing. And then when I open them there will still be nothing.
Double exposure. A warning to travelers.

The less said the better about crafty campground managers who put naive Utahns, who are hypnotically happy to be near any substantial body of water, in the most miserable spot in the place (a disenfranchised KOA somewhere in central Florida between Cypress Gardens and Disneyworld) unaware of the dangers lurking there. Water is a fatal attraction conceived in arid lands, and at home it draws us to the edges of and even into rare ponds choked with algae and duck feces and reservoirs of breathtaking frigidity. Driving across country Eastward one watches rivers grow in number and size and the landscape change from the drab pallet of sunscorched yellow-gray, brown-gray, clay red and dusty blue of distances to the green spectrum. Gradually it seems that every one of the seventeen varieties of green the human eye is capable of distinguishing must be gathered into one place—pine, palmetto, kudzu, bluegrass—Utah's dry cottonwoods and junegrass disappear behind a thousand-mile wall of profligate vegetation until even the forests back in Utah seem sparse. Here everywhere there are pristine ponds and lakes silver and blue and green, unweathered, unscarred. In Utah every puddle is a resort, never uncut in good weather or in bad, by skates, skis, or the trails of boats and swimmers. A trickle of gutter size is a river; the biggest rivers can be waded across in a few steps. The Mississippi can't really be a river; it can only be a very long brown lake being pulled slowly into the Gulf of Mexico. In a large part of the South the Indian word for river must be "hatchie" because they are Thisahatchie and Thatahatchie, and swamps (lakes with trees growing
out of them) are the Thisahatchie Swamp and Thatahatchie Swamp. The swamps come right up to the road and so does the ocean in northwest Florida and in many places it goes right on past the road, and there you are driving across miles of saltwater where there may be seaturtles and starfish and whales and sharks. The ocean begins at Panama City where the beaches are purest white and the air is so moist you need to spoon it up to breathe it and it seems to have its own sluggish tides and undertows, more so than the water.

Stand at the water's placid edge and look down and you will see schools of small fish like minnows darting about no more wave-tossed than if they were in an aquarium. In spite of the muffled thunder (there is no lightning) you think the weather is probably sunny—you see a bright round spot in the sky but the humidity eats into its edges and fades landmarks only a hundred yards away. There are a few drops of rain. No visible clouds. This is living underwater. All that divides you from the ocean is color—blue blue in spite of no sky.

I lay face down on a blanket on Panama Beach's white beach, getting white sand inside my shirt and inside my pants and inside my shoes. A hundred yards east was a long pier and past it everything disappeared, and in the hundred visible yards to the west youths and their girls gamboled with what to my mind was the listless energy of humid climes, and even then I thought, How can anything move? This is where everything stops, the van, the wind, the water, wakefulness. But the tired Utah brain is more arid than these surroundings and it must cast about listlessly for equilibrium, for immersion, for sleep.
It goes in and comes out and goes in ... and comes out. With my eyes closed I heard them moving up and down the beach laughing and in and out of the ocean. In my half-sleep I half-dreamed.

I woke in the dew-soaked sheets thinking the tent had collapsed and the shoreline risen past our heads. Someone said an alligator had been spotted in the lake downshore from the campground. This is the sort of rumor that edifies the tourists. The Law of the Visit states that every remote place is new and old, rotational and evidential. Rotationally it presents a newness or an unexpectedness that makes the traveler newly aware of himself in unfamiliar surroundings. On the evidential side there is the myth that precedes the traveler, the emotion that flies forward and attaches itself to the place. Each place has its own evidences, its fulfilling, romantic details, mountains, fjords, palm trees, beaches, oriental architecture. Alligators. We choose our destinations according to our fantasies. With small encouragement we fit our destinations to our desires. That's what crafty campground managers know. Water for the thirsty Westerners, evidential alligators for the tropical romanticists. Most people not from the tropics have some of that romanticism. Our fantasies are based at least partly on Key Largo and Bwana Devil and Haggard and Buchan and Burroughs (Edgar Rice). We are enticed there by passion and danger. The alligator was an element of danger. Without it Florida would have been something less. I may have been exhausted to the point of despair and uncomfortable beyond imagining, but I was not disappointed. I had seen crocodiles in Africa and slept soundly in a compound knowing they were not half a mile off. In
fenceless Florida, sleeping, or trying to, in a three-walled tent, I had something more to think about. According to the alligator handler in Cypress Gardens, an alligator warms in strange ways to human kindness and is likely to end up biting off much more than just the hand that feeds it. Whether out of affection is beside the point. I wondered whether, based on this principle of the generalizing appetite, supposing our local crocodilian were to wander into the tent and eat Paul, it might also want to eat me.

Long before morning it was evident that my fears had been misplaced. The alligator could not have been more vicious or done more damage than the mosquitoes. You marinate yourself all over with a gritty insect repellent that nauseates the entire body. With what effect? If Berkeley had lived in the tropics, instead of asking silly questions about trees in forests, he might have asked whether, if you soak yourself with repellent and awaken in the morning drained of your meager eight salty pints, philosophy has any way of discovering that any mosquitoes were actually repelled. And he probably would have given the question up as too useless and too painful and the course of modern philosophy would have been much different. You hear them all night long in their spiral patterns above the circular landing strip of the ear. Those that pass by you never hear. This romantic ethos—can't the mosquitoes and the tsetse flies and the malaria and the yellow fever and the encephalitis be left to Susan Hayward and Stewart Granger and the natives? Can't they just suck the blood of Allen Quartermain and Bomba the Jungle Boy? As long as the white traveler or the brown hero encounters them in fiction they are
romantic. They partake of the romantic milieu. Encountered in the flesh, on the flesh, they are the population, hostile and hungry. And then at some point on a sleepless night, having precious little else to do, one might begin to exercise one's negative capability—deliriously—and wonder what we are to them. Any antagonist is a hero in his own world. And these at times seemed to assault us with Byronic fervor and fatality.

By morning I couldn't remember having slept except that it seemed that I had dreamed of unreal shadows passing in a half-light which were probably the desultory flock of geese with their hideously tumored bills wandering near the lakeshore in the early dawn. I hope they were on their way to eat the larvae of any and all insect vermin.

Ah, the life cycle, the food chain! We were part of it too, sent as we were as offerings to the edge of the lake to attract mosquitoes and alligators away from the better-traveled, longer-termed clientele.
Transition

Travel gives us an excellent opportunity to know each other in unexpected ways or in ways all too well expected. The proximity it forces us into has its delightful opportunities, but it makes a deadly combination with fatigue. Irritability and annoyance fall far short of describing the atmosphere of the pages that will not follow. I had considered including fragments of my attempts to say something intelligible about the shuddering, frigid ambience we carried with us at times. We followed a dark cloud much of the journey. Between eternal sorrows and fluttering panics and demand and schemes and unfairnesses that still return regretfully but quickly at the hint of a summoning, I hardly know how to go about describing my memories of the loves we failed to show in a way that is at all kind either to myself or to the rest of us. I had considered including fragments of my attempts to do so, at the same time cancelling the fragments with heavy lines. But I realized that I should be no more disposed to do that when I thought clearly of its implications than I would leave photographs in an album or slides in a carousel that chronicle my or my family's most miserable moments. If I had actually taken the pictures in the first place and stuck them on the page, I surely would have come back later and done more than draw lines through them or face them away from the casual viewer. And when they were gone I would have moved other pictures up to take their places.
Now you can visualize anything your mind can fantasize!

--Walt Disney

Disney as Dreamer

Here is our protagonist, Walt Disney, like Mary Baker Eddy's God through whose dreams we move. He is old and older and bright beyond description. Although he subsumes us, he is cold and distant like all dreamers. We will be disillusioned at his awakening.

Disneyworld is all about fantasy and technology, the ways they work together, the ways, so Disney wishes you to believe and so he strangely makes you wish to believe, you can't have one without the other. Technology eats into our dreams (this is called fulfillment) and convinces us that what we get is what we wanted or is just as good as what we dreamed. Disney is always saying, "Beyond your wildest imagination" (I think he may have invented that expression), or, "Nothing is more magic than this!" Well then, so much for fantasy . . . A rumor has it that Walt Disney is cryogenically preserved, barely dead, to be thawed and revived and cured of whatever ailed him at such a time as technology and medicine permit. If all goes according to his predictions, the ones you keep hearing in Futureworld, the technology the sleeper awakes to will be such a dream beyond his wildest imagination. He'll look at it and know that it is good and take the credit. No mystery in death; what death will become in technology will be what we've been calling it for centuries--a slumber. But let it all happen on Space Mountain. Put him in a car and pull all the switches at once. Let him wake to blinding lights
and ear-splitting bells and sirens—with whiplash.

This is not to say I didn't have a good time; really, it was a good time. I enjoyed it at least as much as Mom did. It wasn't a fulfillment of fantasy because I had never fantasized about it, which may indicate some kind of spiritual failing on my part. Jill had fantasized, I know, because she went absolutely wild, nearly panicking at times worrying that we wouldn't have time to see everything and ride every ride there was. She trekked from ride to ride and show to show with such manic determination that I'm sure she must have squeezed out of the place every last drop of enjoyment there was to be had. Which may be why Disneyworld was the rather arid pleasure it was to me. It was fun, let me say again. But she was having enough fun for ten people so that our own pleasure, supervised as it was by her, seemed a little redundant.

The real fan of futuristic fun, the devotee of a mechanically contrived and manipulated past, the idyllic Dsnian retrospective, will tell you that Disneyworld, which to our great good fortune exists as a place on the map, is just as much an experience, a state of mind. If this is true it is a child's version of madness, the purblind, unadulterated, unencroachable, dizzy pleasure they feign when they toss themselves about and say, "Whee! Look, I'm going crazy!" This is Disneyworld madness; a state of mind from which the only exit is a removal of oneself from the whirling landscape. Disneyworld is a cul-de-sac, a lobotomy, the giant ego that swallows thousands of ids daily and has swallowed most of central Florida, one big advertisement for itself.
If you go to Disneyland, be prepared to be consumed. Be prepared to be taken to pieces, swallowed, and then to be rattled around in somebody else's head for a while. People say, "Did Disney dream this up?" or "This was Disney's dream," thinking they are using the term the way Martin Luther King did when he said, "I have a dream," because "I have a plan" or "I've thought about a society based on racial equality and I think it's a good idea" would not have had that charismatic ring to it. Martin Luther King moved people with his character and his rhetoric to work toward fulfilling his dream. To date it is a noble failure. Disney, also a man with charisma, had a dream too, but that dream was his charisma, his ability to draw a crowd. King and Disney were masters of rhetoric (remember how charmed we were when Disney introduced his television shows?). Disney's rhetoric was commercial—lowbrow in other words—and how convincing it all was, how easily we were convinced by the advertising.

That is why I am here now. Too lowbrow for Martin Luther King. We saw the pictures, heard the P.R. and said, "We gotta go! We gotta have fun!" with the mentality of the animals in the fable who were enticed into the old lion's cave. There were many tracks going in but none coming out, just like here, because when we leave we take Disneyland with us. Many of us, like my sister, bring it with us when we come. For all of us the ferry journey across the lagoon to the fun park is a journey across the Styx, for on the other side we find paradise, Disney's life after death, the most we can hope for out of life. We better be satisfied. We have been consumed.

Utopians and futurists (King, Disney, Buckminster Fuller, Ronald
Reagan, the Soviets, the Young Republicans, gay activists, adventists and millenialists, Nazis, doctors, psychiatrists, gardeners, teachers, anyone who gets out of bed any time during the day) should take note: Lincoln Steffens was wrong, the future does not work, or if it does it is on a small, degraded scale. All the world may become Disneyworld but the social dreamers and the dreamers of individual dreams will have no reason to rejoice for the lot of shunting and herding and submission to artificial stimulation in store for them. Thus the only future that works is a commercial future and somebody else always has the money and the comfort. Somebody else can afford real paradise. Somebody else must discover that accomplished desires necessitate a new, more terrible struggle for perpetuation and against erosion. And at some point the little man in the crowd, understanding the death of his own desire, comes to hope that if most machines must run down, they all will, and this one especially. And then he will have the last laugh, his wish will come true. Disneyworld is proof that there is utopian future but no utopia, no time to be gained that will be free of struggle and conflict. We may eliminate the conflicts we presently struggle in, against each other, against earth, but we will never win the battle against time. What we project we may have the good fortune to create or accomplish, but once a thing comes into existence it is filled more than anything else with a need to remain in existence. For Black people every victory is something that must be held onto tightly or it will be lost even after it is won. In one sense Disney's plan betters King's, but I guess in the long run only very slightly: its means of perpetuation was built in, was in fact
the germ out of which the dream grew. Imagination built its structure on a foundation of commerce.

The dream will continue for a time but not nearly as long as the stars on which Disney and King wished. In fact, Disney says, when you wish upon a star it makes no difference where you are. It makes no difference—on the air, in the paper, on a balcony in Memphis, Tennessee—you whisper to the stars and they all whisper back, "You and your dream will not outlast us." Still, some dreams matter, some don't. Some dreamers of dreams of questionable value dare defy the cosmos, but when Disney wakes from his deep, cold sleep, even if he finds himself king of the world and the whole world is a Disney world, he will know enough about oblivion to know that none of it matters.

Disney's dream may not be at all a dangerous place spiritually, morally, politically. But something like an ideology is at work there, counterfeit as that ideology may be. It is a futurism, and any futurism projects a set of values into the future. It would sound silly to object to Disneyworld on the grounds that it has no social or spiritual value, because that is irrelevant. First of all, Disneyworld presents itself as being free or empty of all such seriousness. But its very vacuousness makes it all the more seductive a substitute for substantial and difficult dreams of a real utopia. Rather than being a dream that radiates social meaning, Disneyworld is a dream that pulls everything toward itself. It implodes. It consumes. Every unit of energy it uses and every bit of matter is dedicated to nothing other than promoting Disneyworld, to subtly and not-so-subtly persuading you to stay and then come back
tomorrow and then come back again next year and tell all your friends and acquaintances how much fun you had or think you had.

The Disney ideology is a complex one; it is a simple imperative trailing a series of ramifications. To the extent that it succeeds, it presents a challenge to Freudian cynicism. Is sex the basis of all fantasy? Disney says, "Bring fantasy into the realm of the senses, make it wild and make it fun, but keep it clean. It's possible," he says, "Disneyworld is proof." The cynic says, "How clean can rides be that simulate or substitute themselves for orgasm, these phallic vehicles thrusting through vaginal structures?" Since in order to be successful Disneyworld must be patronized by the American public, whose self-satisfied morality is so easily perverted, it becomes for us a myth, it creates itself as an acceptable icon of the myth of American transcendence over Old World cynicism, Freudianism and Darwinism and other determinisms that have had the major hand in defining our age. Disney's ideology is commercially necessary, whether it is sincerely held or not.

Disney offers no proof that the cynical view is incorrect in his case. He offers no proof that the opposite side of cynicism is not an illusion. Illusions are his stock in trade. the dreamer is an illusionist, the dream an illusion. The magic of Disneyworld is sleight-of-hand. Through becoming physically involved in fantasy, we are manipulated into coming to accept and appreciate our underdoghood, our position as forever the manipulated. We are in somebody else's dream.

Set aside for another occasion the possibility of examining the
whole of Disneyworld as a dream-text for Freudian analysis. Consider Disney himself as a psychoanalyst. Compare him to Freud. Where Freud's method of curing mental illness constituted by deep-seated false or counterproductive notions is through analysis of the personality into units and moments, thus bringing the origins of neuroses to consciousness so that they can be dispelled, Disney's method of perpetuating an illusion is through a spurious analysis of the person, the customer, into specious, schizoid, illusory parts—the body and the mind. It is not so much that in real life the body and the mind are inseparable for discussion and manipulation—maybe they are and maybe they aren't—but the body and the mind he presents us with are vague philosophical impossibilities, nonsense parading as meaning.

To cases. The highly touted EPCOT Center was still a month or more away from opening when we attended Disneyworld, so in place of it we got its advertisement. This happened to be the first event we went to. EPCOT stands for Experimental Prototype Community Of Tomorrow. They're big on tomorrow at Disneyworld, and letting us sample the tomorrow of what they tell us are our fantasies today. We were instructed to enter a circular theater that didn't have any seats but had rails which not only designated rows but also came in very handy when the awe- and vertigo-inspiring continuous 360° film was shown. You never know what pyrotechnics Disney is going to come up with next, but when you see them you can recognize them as Disney for the amazement they provoke and for their aesthetic limitations. They proceed from an outlook that is profoundly uninterested in what is not
sensational and immediately entertaining and hence confines innovations to what appeals to patrons' most immediately accessible senses and expectations. I can say little more or less than that I was entertained. There is no reason that that shouldn't be enough.

The 360° movie takes you by surprise with a rush of rapid movement across a landscape. Thus cheated of the pull of inertia (even if the movement begins slowly--and it may, my memory falters on this point--it becomes rapid very quickly), you are thrown into a giddy disorientation until you can adjust your sight and equilibrium to the illusion. As the scenes and velocity change you become more adept at this adaptation but remain susceptible to sudden turns, changes in elevation, and prospects of collisions with objects in the path. The obvious technical limitation of the film is that, besides giving some people nausea or whiplash, to be effective it must keep moving. Even the grandest views are momentary. One moment you are suspended between Alps, and the next you are speeding down a crowded Hong Kong side street. The movie is necessarily short. After a few minutes of this, I remember it being explained to us in glowing and elevated terms what the purpose and possibilities of the EPCOT Center were. It had something to do with a connection between technology and world peace and prosperity. A multi-national, multi-racial utopia was vaguely put forward (part of the EPCOT Center consists of several small areas given to various atypical cultural landscape, architecture, cuisine, etc., from around the world), but as always in keeping with the famous Disney ethnography, all non-Western peoples and cultures were represented in ways that Western eyes find either
humorous or amazing. Everyone is cheerful and everyone is either pulling a rickshaw (symbol of empire) or half-clothed and dancing rhythmically and exotically but not immodestly, and nobody is poor or sick or cruel or addicted to drugs or intellectual or productive or homosexual or heterosexual.

Thus you have the film's aesthetic limitation, typically Disnian, proceeding from the Disnian blindness to ethnic morality. One suspects that behind the propounded plan for world peace and cooperation lies a kind of conservatism greatly at odds with any "one world" plea. It is an American showman's way of preserving the traditional American paternalistic identity to exploit for his own commercial purposes. We like the notion of learning something while we are having fun, we like to go away with a sense that we have been "broadened." That is why some of the flakiest and most popular magicians like David Copperfield give brief historical sketches of their tricks or of the objects they are going to make disappear, or why they weave their illusions into grossly sentimental sketches, appealing to our "nobler" emotions. We will hold to what we have been bamboozled in to thinking has enriched us. Really, we are here to be entertained, not to have the way we think of ourselves, big brother to a handicapped world, altered. And so through stereotype both of ourselves and others we are shown that we can stay the way we are and still come to understand and love one another. We find this a wonderful lesson and very pleasant to contemplate.

The main part of the EPCOT dream is a multi-national research center that Disney hopes will provide the keys to our cosmic
salvation. It is already a famous Disneyworld symbol—the giant geodesic dome. In this presentation it is described in soft science fiction terms, and this is Disney's dream, the more serious part of it. Disney as Prometheus, Disney as Christ, Disney as Rama, Disney the bodhisattva. Then comes the annunciation in deep dulcet tones like something out of Brave New World, "Now you can visualize anything your mind can fantasize." Not your mind. You. You visualize. There's you and then there's your mind. So you must be your body. And you are the important one. While your superfluous mind is ineffectually fantasizing, you are seeking realization, the statement implies. The voice glides across the sentence, emphasizing "visualize" as if it meant something more and not less than fantasize. Of course, you can't "realize" everything your mind can fantasize because your so-called mind is not bound by material logic. Whereas fantasy almost always involves visualizing. Realization of any fantasy occurs in soft science fiction. Since, on the other hand you can fantasize anything that can be realized and more, in its ability to be visualized fantasy is fuller and more universal than reality. EPCOT poses as reality, but it is as true here as it is in all of Disneyworld that fantasy is better than reality as long as the illusion that it is real can be sustained. The EPCOT invocation suggests this subliminally.

You and your mind. You go about attached most of the time. Or your mind may precede or follow you. It may disappear altogether for hours, days, years. If the mind is to be found again it is certain that it will not be found in any other place than where the body is.
Still, the concept language gives us that we are composed of separable entities is no mere metaphor. Ask Disney. See for yourself. Having been cut into bite-sized pieces, you are still you, yet you are not your mind.

Thus factionalized and delegated, you are ready to be digested into the teeming future and reconstituted on Disney's terms by way of various exposures to the Disnian synaesthesia, a synaesthesia that reminds you of the discretion of your parts by assaulting each simultaneously with a different force. Thus, in the future technology is already accustomizing us to, our feet move in one direction while our head goes in another, we see something spectacular while we hear something quite as immense but altogether unconnected with what we see. This way we become accustomed to our own aporias, the gaps between our parts. We come to like it because it means we are modern. This is our sentimental education. Futureworld seems hardly a preview anymore.

Contrary to convincing portents of a variety of global catastrophes, it is pleasant to learn that the future will be fun. Walt Disney, in cooperation with General Electric, Kodak, Pepsi Cola, and any of a number of other megacorporations, is seeing to it that the old-fashioned values are carried into the future. Hasn't he heard that things go better with Coke? Instead of nuclear-necessitated Rest in Peace, the Disney future will be nuclear-induced Rest and Peace. Peace through international sharing of technology, of giving all those funny little Third World people all the conveniences to be funny and little in. Rest by remaining stationary everywhere,
even getting everywhere: Rest the ultimate thrill. Thus General Electric puts you on a carousel that you are not supposed to know is moving until you get out, and invites you, while you are being manipulated, to appreciate from your superior viewpoint the naive appreciation of progress that one unaging family expresses at ten-year intervals through this century. You chuckle at their raptures over the electric light bulb, stereophonic sound, garbage disposals. By the end, Father is able to do everything, have everything, experience everything, without moving from his easychair, and Mother has everything at her fingertips from where she stands in the kitchen. This is one way we appreciate it. Twentieth Century Family has evolved in front of our very eyes into intelligent, up-to-date people. They didn't just start the century stupid, they started it poor, and everyone educated by free enterprise advertising knows that the poor are stupid and the middle class are smart. Still, here is Disneyland's middle class congregation being manipulated into sentimental gratitude to G.E. for all it does for us. And these robots are getting so lifelike these days, it's a wonder what they'll think of next! General Electric is working hard to make things better for you! Since "things" are getting better, the present is obviously superior to the past. Sure we have the threat of nuclear war, overpopulation, etc., etc., but would you really like to have lived back then? No, we are better off for grasping the tautology that the Twentieth Century is the most modern (best) century, and this moment is the most modern (best) moment in the most modern (best) century. We are wise. Even the realization at the end of the G. E. pageant
that we have gone around in a circle unawares (you realize it because you don't quite go all the way around) does not deflate our sense of being wise and fortunate; we feel comforted to know that G.E. has our future in its capable hands. So God bless Disney and General Electric, cosponsors of the future!

And so into the future where we "visualize" greater and greater rewards for less and less effort. This is the common dream. We've visualized it often, had it flogged at us by Disney's artistically inferior colleagues, Mssrs. Hanna and Barbera. And while the format of their presentations is facetious, we know the dream is not, and we know that at present we live somewhere between the Flintstones, who always deceive themselves that they are putting less efforts into their "conveniences" than they are (see their "automobiles" that start and stop on the foot power of the driver and passengers), and the Jetsons, who luckily for them do nothing for themselves except push buttons and who are only occasionally bound to pesky physical laws like gravity by the imperative of slapstick. We might suspect that the Jetsons' silliness were a sign of the atrophy brought on by automation if the Flintstones were any more clever than the Jetsons. But we believe too profoundly in the realization power of the dream of prophecy to be deterred by signals of decay or of Armeggedon. The future is technological, it is not ideological or biological or theological or political. Our salvation is the smooth transitions technology makes between the parts of our fragmented selves while we are at rest. This is the computer's great McLuhanized atonement. We are pulled apart and not required to use the subsumed faculties unless
some gleam of masochistic pleasure prompts us to do so. Technology
takes our faculties upon itself and we are eased more and more to
living in the mind, fantasizing and visualizing until the mind itself
goes and is subsumed, ravished, raptured. Transcendence. Mystical
union with our destiny. And who is behind the computer integrating
the idea of himself with the idea of the omniscient, omnipotent
machine? Our prophet, Walt Disney.

Here are some things Disney's prophecy should prepare us for if
we take him seriously (and we do):

1. The future is fun. In fact, it is a big fun park.

2. In the future we will be whisked from place to place in
a variety of vehicles on tracks and rails; there will be
a pleasant disturbance of equilibrium except on the
"sublimation rides" or on the expresses which will
simulate orgasm and soothe the repression and violence
in our natures caused by the pressures of future life
which will be brought on by things like standing in
lines for hours to ride the sublimation rides. (The
future may be overpopulated but it will always find ways
to balance the problems this may cause.)

3. Computers will perform incredible logistical tasks of
getting a million people to half a million places
without making them bump into each other. We will go
great distances with no physical effort to end up not
very far from where we started.

4. This way the status quo will advertise itself circularly
(any jostling for position in an overcrowded world could have far-reaching, drastic results). Go far and believe you are going somewhere but go nowhere. All journeys end at home. The future is home once you've been to Disneyland. You will return, certainly in time, probably in space. All of the rides take you away and bring you back. The pattern will sink in.

5. We have assumed for too long that the two stereotypes we hold of the future, the utopian and the anti-utopian, the paradisal and the totalitarian, were irreconcilable. The eschatological-millennial view seems to indicate a future containing both possibilities, but in this view they are subsequent and not simultaneous. Disney proves they can be simultaneous. You have paradise but you are herded from place to place and made to go through mazes and to wait. You are made to perform and are rewarded with a ride that ends near the scene of your performance so that you may have the fulfillment, now that you are free, of seeing the scores of others still performing, going through the mazes. That is the real reinforcement. They are made to watch your release so
that they will hold your success against you. This will be an incentive for them to perform well. We will be playthings to the totalitarian gods, the computers.

6. Performance is a necessary substitute for production, because in the future with overpopulation and computers we will not produce, we will only consume. So we will sing for our supper, or dance slowly through the mazes.

7. The future is an anticlimax. If Space Mountain is any indication, the amount of time spent waiting or performing compared to the amount of time spent being rewarded is about forty to one. We will wait about an hour for the ninety-second reinforcement of being thrown around at breakneck speeds past flashing lights and sudden, incredibly shrill sounds. Possibly the ratio increases toward its extremes as the population increases. There is evidence to indicate that a majority of people are willing to submit to this conditioning.

8. I don't want to go into the future.

Knowing that the future is an anticlimax, it is hard to worry much about the future of Disneyland. The pattern is established. When the future catches up to Disney's predictions, the present Futureworld will dwindle into the pleasant silliness the rest of Disneyland is; the space age will be viewed in retrospective like the Haunted Castle which evokes nostalgia with its spooks animated in Disney's inimitable sentimental style. Disney's style is most evident
in the milieu he has created, even more than in specific characters
like Mickey Mouse and Dumbo, Disney's major contribution to popular
culture. And since it is the human milieu that is emphasized in
Futureworld, when it becomes a pastworld and we look on it with the
indulgence reserved for viewing the benighted past, we will then
recognize in Disney's prophecy the style he gave us in Snow White and
The Sword in the Stone with their anthropomorphized denizens, and
discover that we ourselves have become those creatures who, like the
mice in Cinderella, exist only to serve the star performer and fulfill
his dream. To the imperial, benevolent Walt Disney I think we must
appear as the humble, smiling rickshaw pullers do to us. To bring the
gospel of salvation through mindless submission to pointless
technology to the whole world is the Disneyman's burden. It will be
Disney's and not King's one world and one people. We shall be
overcome.

Try to give your attention to something else and not the madness
across the lagoon where we have spent half the day and must soon
return to spend the rest. Paul and Jill are still happily lost in the
confusion. Mom and I are resting in the shade. The song on the Muzak
speakers is "Fly Me to the Moon." The song is "Stairway to Heaven"
played by 101 Strings. The song is "Disneyworld! Disneyworld! Lots
of fun for boys and girls! Because it's Disneyworld! Disneyworld!
Lots of fun for boys and girls!" Because we're living in a Disney
world, and it's getting more Disney every day. Fun. And this year is
the tenth anniversary and they're calling it the Disneyworld
"Tencennial!" Get it? Ten-cennial? What do you think, the world's
going to end by bad grammar or a malapropism or a stupid coinage?

Once when this time was a future nobody was promising, our whole family was at Disneyland having a very nice time. We took a ride on that glorified el-train the monorail. When we got off who should get off at the same time from the first car with a dignified looking group of dignitaries and looking terribly dignified himself, but himself, Walt Disney! Nobody in Disneyland noticed until my mother screamed, "There's Walt Disney! It's Walt Disney!" He looked up and the crowd looked at him and said excitedly, "It is Walt Disney! He was on the Monorail!" His pencil moustache smiled as he moved away. He saw Mom. The awestruck crowd moved hesitantly toward him, but something about him forbade contact or communication other than across several feet of Fantasyland. And quickly the dreamer was gone somewhere into his dream and we were embarrassed that we might have disturbed him from it momentarily. But I don't think we did.
Four slides from St. Augustine

1. Hard candy, old money. Would Paul tell the look on the boy's face? He seemed not to. And Jill did not even see him. The look was covert and full of despair. It could be I was mistaken. Early evening after a hot day, a tour of Kennedy Space Center and a long drive up the coast, Daytona, Daytona Beach, eventually St. Augustine with its narrow gray beach and its cool, humid winds. Nine days and something like twenty-five hundred miles into the trip. One may be likely to see despair in many faces.

One may. Even as the cobwebs start to clear, as they say, in the cool sea air; even as you stand down from the dirt access road onto the narrow gray beach, eased by the sight of the gray ocean and gray clouds diverging at the fine edge of the horizon like two wheels rolling on each other toward your feet and head. Some hundreds of yards southward on a man-piled heap of sand and rocks jutting into the Atlantic is the resort hotel, the rich hotel, and it is towards this that the middle-aged man (New York? Wall Street?) and his paramour are walking. Young, with no vocation but to be beautiful, although one dares assume by the age of his... broker?... skilled with his hands, the speculative paramour has found his bullish market in hard candy, old money. And just the fog of exhaustion dispersing at the prospect of rest may put despair from my eyes onto this boy. At any rate, it is not really utter, nothing to
be called existential. There is a silveryness in the gray of the afternoon, through cloud breaks a goldness. The boy's look is wistful, a touch of embarrassment. Quick but long enough or sad enough to linger around his head when he turns away. My brother and sister should not see this boy and especially they should not understand. Not so much do they need protecting from knowledge of the world and our isolation in it, but they must be kept from falsely assuming that they have come face to face with the dangerous, overwhelming knowledge of evil, rather than simply another melancholy isolation.

2. **Aquarium, Jill laughing.** Mom found a very nice beach drive motel run by a very nice man who gave us a very nice beech-paneled room for a very reasonable price. After a while we walked down the road and found a seafood restaurant somewhat too decent for our budget. Tired of franchise dining, we went in and were seated near a large salt-water aquarium containing large languid colorful fish. They watched us eat their relatives. In brief, friendly conversation, our waitress, whose appearance and speech were sophisticated enough for this middle-brow establishment, told us that her son used to be very wild, running with a bad crowd, involved with destructive elements like drugs and vandalism, but that she no longer worried about him since he was Born Again and settled down to a Christian way of life. To be Born Again or to have been Born Again is a Southern mania so widely
remarked that one is tempted unfairly and illogically to speculate that a collective and historical guilt may be its origin. They call it "gospel." But it always strikes us as immodest and in the setting of this restaurant, unsophisticated and incongruous, even told in this lady's sane, congenial tones. I think Jill had started giggling before we came inside. She could not or would not stop, and patrons looked at us wondering where they could be from and if these silly people would not be more in their element eating at Hardee's. I told her so, knowing in advance what her reaction would be, and when the laughter failed to cease even during the waitress's witnessing, the waitress said that some people should leave their children at home. She meant it but she said it smiling, so it wasn't until ten minutes later during a lull that Jill realized that the waitress was referring to her. This set her off again. I'm sure she must have hyperventilated into the ozone, and the frothier her blood, the lighter her head, the more she laughed. I imagined her head a round outrageous tropical fish floating free, tumbling around in the tank behind her. That is how I waited until one of her only happy moments (that I have seen) in years to decapitate her. And the guilt and the love of this lovely moment were strong but too short.

3. Flood, lightning. The memory of where we stood middleground grows indistinct, but it seems to have been a platform built
solid into the ocean and sloped outward at its base to ease
the fury of the tide. The fury was not well-eased. We
watched the waves smash and split and leap high into the air
sometimes above our heads and felt their spit and heard
their roaring and the cracks of their bodies against stone
and concrete. We could hardly hear each other but we shared
a terrified delight. I always see a darkness when I turn
eastward; if it is not close mountains denying distances it
is the simple impenetrability of the past, the
unknowableness of origin. Here we stood on the eastern
verge caring to know as little of the ocean's white-veined
blackness as we could see and hear without touching. If we
had immersed ourselves, we would have understood darkness
far beyond the limits of scrutiny. We looked beyond at
night and finally turned away.

In the west then we saw a fantastic thing. Still banks
of clouds crowded in longitudinal rows, running down the
length of Florida across our line of vision. And lightning
hidden in the folds illuminating the divided gray distances
randomly at intervals, toward home and back and somewhere in
between. It was a cosmic pantomime, a dumb show; there was
no thunder, no thunder at all. Someone was turning lights
on and off in the long galleries with silent switches. If
there was any sound it would have been whispering or
footfalls in an echo chamber, but it was all drowned in the
tide. We stood and watched for some time, amazed.
4. **An escape.** We miscalculated. When we realized this we should have turned back. But we miscalculated again. We went forward to the wooden steps that went up to the platform. When we started for them the water had reached the rocks at their base. It was still gentle, deepening slowly. We had time, no great distance, and shoefuls of shells. I was barefoot. Mom walked on the inside close to the sea wall.

Then the water was too deep behind us. We were forced forward. The ocean had been wedging toward us from the steps, then it crescented around us, then it lapped our ankles and we rolled up our pants. Then it grew stronger and deeper.

The sea wall offered no help. From any point you could climb the rocks a little ways up and no farther and then you could not move along the wall or if you could it would be very slowly and the tide would catch you quickly. It would pull your feet off the jagged rocks and tumble you on the jaggeder rocks below and then return and pull you beyond whatever threshold death might be.

When it had reached our knees we felt its strong persuasiveness. It was not persuasive in a pathetic universe but in a moral one. This is an animism when the elements conspire this way; that we can remain animists even at times of such extremity, not questioning the justness of the final destiny circumstance has elected to impose, is a
mystery far greater than the meaning of external events. It is an unofficial article of faith that whatever happens is according to the will of God, the animus. If we are spared, it may be for our righteousness or to give us a second chance to mend our ways. If we are taken it may be that we have fulfilled ourselves in goodness or it may be a conservative measure to prevent our further self-degradation. It is ration balancing in the interests of the moral law. For the imperfect this belief can be burdensome.

If the ocean is persuasive, I hope that our resistance is a denial of animism. But when the threshold of death is reversed and becomes the threshold of life, and when we are safely beyond it, we think of our danger again and say something greater wanted us to overcome it. Safety was placed within our reach.

We finally stood on a couple of boulders near the wooden stairs but not near enough. We were lucky at least to have a firm footing because the water was coming to our thighs and our next move was far from clear. The tide was strong and quick. We were terribly worried. If we were washed out to sea, would anyone come and rescue us? No one had come to aid us yet. Was anybody watching us? Maybe from the rich hotel which wasn't far away? The desperate young man and his sponsor pausing in a casual, embarrassed morning embrace to watch from the hotel window? If we weren't so desperate ourselves we would be embarrassed at
being caught in such a silly spot. UTAH MOM 51 AND SON 30 DROWNED IN ST. AUGUSTINE HIGH TIDE. How should we have known? Inlanders. Thirsty inlanders.

I put my book in Mom's bag and handed her my shoes. I leapt for the stairs, missed and cut my foot, but then pulled myself up. Then I pulled Mom up, but a heavy wave jarred her on the way and her prescription sunglasses fell into the sandy, moiling drink. Too deep and dangerous to retrieve.

It was good not to have lost each other. It was all in the nick of time, because when we came back a little later to look for the sunglasses, the water was five or six feet above where it had been. Much less than that would have swept us away. But fresh from our adventure my foot stung and bled. Mom was sundazed and disappointed about her glasses. We were shaken and soaked to our chests. We walked back to the motel hand in hand. I left a dotted line of grateful blood.
Later that same morning Mom and Jill did the laundry while Paul and I got the van serviced. The men at the service station looked as much rednecks as what you'd see in Utah, only I thought they looked rougher because we were not in Utah—we were some place strange and if anything happened to us, if we were overcharged or if the van were tampered with so we would have to go back for repairs, there would be nothing we could do to protect ourselves. Actually, funnily enough, the only time anything of the sort ever happened to me was at home in Provo, Utah, at a Ford dealership, but the distrust it bred it me of garage mechanics (it was my first car), combined with my unfamiliarity with this place and the responsibility it seemed to me was mine for keeping transportation matters running smoothly, caused me to worry perhaps more than the situation really called for, even when the mechanic asked us to stay outside while he serviced our vehicle.
For breakfast in St. Augustine we had fried eggs, hotcakes and grits. The waiter was oriental, a fact that seemed noteworthy in a place serving grits. This restaurant had little games at the tables consisting of a triangular piece of wood with several small holes filled with pegs. There was one fewer peg than holes. The object was to eliminate pegs by jumping until there was only one peg left on the board. None of us did that well at it, but we ended up buying two of the games to help occupy the traveling hours, and then we drove to Jacksonville where one of those things happens where the highway gets swallowed up in city streets and you have to keep watching for signs with your highway number. We missed a turn and were afraid to go around the block to pick up our route because we knew from long experience that you can really get lost that way, so we looked at the map and discovered we could continue on straight for a while to rejoin. The trouble with those maps is the scale seems to shrink as you proceed toward their edges and so it looks like you have about five blocks to go when you really have five miles. The longer it takes you to find your route the more certain you become that you are truly lost, and just as you are about to turn around and go back
you discover that you are approaching that place you hoped you were headed for all along. (Ironically, the place we got most lost in was Grand Junction, Colorado, on our very first day out). There were two pretty girls crossing one Jacksonville street. I wanted to wave to them.

By the time we got to a small town outside the Okefenokee Swamp, the sky had clouded up and it looked like rain. We made a rest stop at a convenience store where they didn't have a gentlemen's and a ladies', only an everybody's, so we all went one at a time, some of us taking much longer than others. I got a peach Nehi, and, having never come across one before, wondered if it was only a local thing because of Georgia peaches, not, of course, that the manufacturers would ever have thought of using anything but artificial flavor in it. It did not taste so great, but I drank the whole thing, and then when everybody was ready we drove to the Okefenokee Swamp.

By the time we got there it was raining but not real hard. The trouble was, there was lightning along with very heavy, dark clouds in the distance, so we could not go on an outboard tour of the swamp. It may have been just as well, because when we do this sort of thing I start imagining
horrible things like an alligator tipping over the boat and eating someone in my family and me watching helplessly. It's a perverse, shuddersome thought. There were some alligators in the little lagoon where the boats were docked. The man said they were waiting for handouts and fallins. They would eat you in a minute.

We drove to a place where we could hike, which we then did, going along to an observation point where we could look at the swamp. Then we walked to an old homestead where an old lady guide who had lived there for forty or fifty years showed us the relics of her formerly self-sufficient life. She did not hide her bitterness over the government's taking it away from her and making her move outside the swamp where she now lived in a small white house. The ground around this rough old place that her husband had built and her sons grown up in was empty and gravelly like someone might have been going to build a parking lot, but farther off were tall pines and cypresses and in the woods there was the game they had always hunted--deer, foxes, ducks, bears, alligators. "Friends used to come here and bring their friends to hunt. I was always putting people up, and I loved it, ever last minute of it. Once a year the
scouts come for a one week camp and you should have seen us hustlin'. Seems all I ever had time for was cooking for those men even when it was only my own here, but I did plenty of other things--made all these quilts, for instance, and even tried my hand at furniture. That chair over there--made it myself out of white pine. Well the government was just waiting for us. They decided they owned all the land hereabouts, and they was waiting for my sons to move away and my husband to die. See it wasn't so important to them at first because they was just starting to develop it as a wilderness and we weren't really in the way, but after a while they started treating us like we was their guests and would have to leave as soon as the party was over which they would say when it was. Just to make it easier on me they said they would let me come in during the days and give tours through the house that I helped build and that used to be mine. Do you think that would be easy? I told them. People would be acting like they owned it more than I did and they would be right because the government said so. I did it because I knew I was going to miss the place, but this is worse so I told them I was quittin'. Let me tell about my sons . . .
We hiked a different direction and came to a wood-board trail that crossed green, choked pools. I began to think the mosquitoes might be fair game for a hunter with a big gun. I swear, I had a fight with one that was almost as big as a hummingbird. I had not had good luck with mosquitoes on this trip but they had had very good luck with me.

At one of the pools we met a fat, bald man smoking a cigar. He said he had just moved from Cincinnati to St. Augustine where he had bought a plot of land sight unseen and moved to a house there. He seemed to be feeling something like peace and contentment. He pointed in the pool where a large turtle had its head poking out of the water. It took a while to see it, it and everything else was so still and green. The man watched the turtle with such an intense, still concentration that he seemed more a part of the natural surroundings than a stranger to them, even with his cigar and his hard Eastern accent. He was as still as the turtle who seemed to be watching the man with the same fascination. Finally, the turtle turned and dove down among the mossy roots of a bush that was growing out of the pool. The man said that earlier he had seen a
colorfully banded poisonous snake twist and glide through the water and disappear in the same direction. In a while the man's wife came along with two beautiful dark daughters. Together they walked back up the trail in the direction of civilization.

The road ran alongside a canal. We saw an alligator in the stagnant water and stopped the van and got out and looked for a minute or two. The rain had stopped for a while but now it started up again so we drove away across Georgia in it.

It was a two-lane highway winding around a wooded countryside gleaming with the season. In little towns Black youths stood on porches under awnings or sprinted past the houses and down the road, enjoying the feel of the cool rain and their strong legs pushing the ground. They were all smiling or dreaming.

These two canny women--hillbillies, I imagine--was running a barbecue house just off the freeway. It looked real authentic and all, everything wooden and rough so you wouldn't want to sit down wearing anything thinner than denim jeans and then eat with one hand holding on to your barbecue pork sandwich and the other holding your bluetick's collar so he don't shinny up and bite one of them fat old ladies
who is now telling my ma that they can't break a five. Ma goes over to the gas station next door for change and in the meantime this city slicker pays them with ones. Then I come along with a sandwich in one hand and the other hand around a greasy five-dollar bill. Then the old whatchamacallit ups and gives me a look like she will bite my legs off at the knees and says, "Ain't you got ears? I just told her [pointing at Ma] that I can't break a five." I'll just bet. The sandwich was good but it made my stomach hurt. Anyways, barbecue and pork always does, what with my ulcer.

We spent that night in a motel in a small town not far over the South Carolina state line. The next night was spent in a truck stop motel just over the Virginia state line. Behind the motel was a dense, damp, cobwebbed wood. Entering it was like closing your eyes and seeing the dark floating image of your mind treading on its own heels. My tennis shoes slipped in the primeval mud, and every time I walked into one of the elastic webs I knew I felt giant spiders crawling up my legs and down my back. When I turned back I found I had almost lost sight of the motel. A few more steps and I think I would have been lost.
The man in the room next to ours drove a car with Florida plates and a decal in the rear window that read, "WARNING: THE DRIVER OF THIS VEHICLE IS ARMED AND WILL USE HIS WEAPON TO PROTECT HIMSELF AND HIS PROPERTY." It seemed our van might be safe next to his car, but I felt a little nervous about having to go so near to his property. The most suspecting people are also the most suspect. No one wants to be around someone who sleeps with a gun under his pillow.

Or so you would think. But, it being a truck stop, trucks were coming and going all night, and all night every so often this guy's motel room door would slam, and a little while later it would slam again twice, and the radio would go on very loud, and then after a while the door would slam, the radio would go off, and the door would slam. A few minutes or a half hour later, two slams of the door and the radio playing very loud again. All night long.

We took a shortcut to Williamsburg on a two-lane road through the greenest country we have ever seen. If landscapes were food, Virginia would be a rich dessert with flavors like chocolate and mint that steal all your senses and surround you in luxuriance. Virginia is a cool feather quilt on a
cool feather bed; it is a baroque masterpiece, a Persian carpet, and unending fantasy. If you are from Utah, cool gales fanning glades, shepherds piping to nymphs, genteel climates—these seem tedious and academic, the product of addled courtliness. Then you come to Virginia with its bowers and meadows.

My sister did not want to be at historic Williamsburg. The constant rain is the easiest way to explain that indisposition, but I think that a little cloud would have been following her that day even without the rain. She did not want to be in historic Williamsburg and that was that, and she succeeded in gaining our sympathy—we did not want her to be there either. "Ornery" is hardly the word for what she was.

Williamsburg is chock full of historical interest and historically interested people, even in the rain. Granted, a majority of the restored or reconstructed places, homes, liveries, bakeries, etc., are merely authentic, which of course is not the same as historic. I had not realized the early Americans were so big on souvenir shops and commemorative Williamsburg paperweights, spoons, plates, banners, etc. I imagine that when the House of Burgesses met, representatives must have
thrilled to know that they could go home and not only tell all their friends that they had been to historic Williamsburg but prove it with a pennant or an ashtray. I wonder if all those burgesses and their wives and kids seemed as authentic to themselves as they do now to us.

All whimsy aside, I usually don't go for places like this, but Williamsburg is so dignified in layout and architecture, the House of Burgesses has such atmosphere, that you can't help but feel some of what the promoters intend for you to feel. The place really does live, even if the connections between its present and its past are rather blurred. If you don't have much of an idea about what went on here (and I'm not going to go into it here), there is a film about it you can see starring Jack Lord who was obviously much younger when all of this took place, but still as grim as ever (and wouldn't you be, starting a revolution?).

I dragged us down to William and Mary College in the rain. It has some dandy buildings with all the old oak interiors and furniture which they still use. I persuaded us over to the building the English offices were housed in. I found the graduate offices and was interested to see if the people there looked any different than my own
peers, any more sophisticated or world-weary than we think we are, but they didn't. They looked the same: as if they didn't know anything but thought they knew everything. I went away greatly enlightened.

Then we walked back toward Williamsburg in the rain, stopping on the way at a large ice cream place. I had rum raisin and chocolate chip mint. The rum raisin tasted too real, like it really had rum in it, so I didn't know if I should eat it. But my mom offered to trade me for hers, and I knew then that it would be all right if I ate it, so I split it with her and suffered no ill effects except my sister's ire over being dragged around Williamsburg in the rain.

Lana should be calling him Steve by now, but he was so insistent: "You must call me 'Steve,' Lana--no more Professor Renfield. After all, I think we have established much more than a teacher-student relationship." But she felt prevented, she really did. Much more than a student-teacher relationship, for sure. He had given her an 'A' in "Themes in Postwar American Fiction" but she had earned it almost, even if on the first day she had come to class with her stack of novels and short story collections--Bellow, Malamud, O'Connor,
Welty, Mailer--and raised her hand rather boldly and asked, "'Post' which war, Professor Renfield--World War II or Viet Nam?" His answer had made the class laugh more loudly than the joke justified, and she had blushed, resolving never to contribute anything more. But she did end up occasionally asking a harmless question or sharing a minor insight, and one day, halfway through the semester, she came to his office to ask him to look at a short personal essay she had written, and he had found it "sensitive," "almost profound." After which there was that establishing much more than an academic relationship at moments that were so clandestine--long, long after school hours and always so far away from campus, and he was so careful that his wife was at some meeting or out of town so she would never know that he had even left the house. The overly careful ones always get found out, Lana's roommate told her. But he hadn't yet. Those moments were so clandestine, so discreet, that they seemed to have nothing to do with any other moments. This sort of thing was what she had always dreamed of, as a romance-obsessed teenager, as being 'real life,' but now she doubted--she doubted he loved her even if he said he did. One of his favorite phrases in class
was "the total fabric"—the total fabric of American fiction, the total fabric of Twentieth Century social history. Lana wondered what place their discreet moments had in the total fabric of his life. She could not find a place for them in hers.

Professor Renfield had paid her way to Washington out of some secret fund so they could spend a whole discreet week together. He had flown first and found a hotel, and then he had met her flight at the airport. He said he had contacts in Washington—friends—but she had not seen any. Presumably he had done his business before she had come. He said he had been to Washington many times, that it was an "interesting" city, not his favorite, but "interesting." This seemed to be the case, he knew so much about everything there. He had told her in an ironic tone that he would show her "wonders" and this he did: The Washington Monument, about which he said with a sneer like the one he used in class for writers he considered inferior ("overly experimental wimps" he often called them) that Washington could never have lived up to that or Martha would have said something on the subject; the Lincoln Memorial, where he said, "A man of stone—went through two wives and all of
the Southern states," and then he declaimed the Gettysburg Address very loudly and sarcastically to her embarrassment because there were other tourists around; the Washington, D.C., ghettos, where he drove the rented Audi quickly through the outskirts with the windows up, telling her, "Washington is nine-tenths Black; Howard University is all Black. A white acquaintance taught there but found himself not accepted and then ostracized and then in the end not renewed. He said it was discrimination but had no real desire to stay on. Never considered that it might have been that he is such a rotten teacher with such a boring specialty. Eighteenth Century British, for God's sake! Yes, Washington is about nine-tenths Black now and getting worse. Believe me, I am totally, totally committed to racial equality, equal opportunity, etcetera, etcetera, and I think for that very reason they should be more evenly distributed, and not allowed to gather like iron filings at a magnet. They need to be assimilated. That's the whole idea behind all this legislation which these people are only making it impossible to enforce." And so on.

He knew so much that he couldn't stop talking.

Some things he said stayed with her. If she didn't think so much about them at the time, the cracks
about Washington and Lincoln, this idea of assimilation, they might come back to her later. They came to her in the hotel room. He was quiet then; there was nothing for him to comment on. She wanted to tell him that none of her Black friends ever talked about being assimilated. She wanted to ask why he was showing her all this and telling her all this. He could never come straight at a subject and say something about it that was true and not filtered through his personality, his opinions, or his attitudes. He was not showing her Washington, he was showing her himself—quite consciously, she suspected—he was showing her his passion, his intelligence, his youthfulness, his humanity, his history. This came to her as a revelation. She wrote in her journal for future reference, "Think about casual conversation as a way of talking about yourself independently of what you are actually saying. It really works but it does not always make people any more interesting."

She had always thought he was nice-looking for his age, especially with his dark beard peppered with gray, which he had grown much more successfully than some of his teacher friends and rivals. This was the first thing she had ever noticed about him. And he was an amusing, even an
exciting teacher for an hour three times a week. She had never suspected that days spent with him could be so tedious. Back at school, during their brief encounters, he told her things about herself she had wished ever since she had been a teenager that someone would tell her, but no one ever had until he did. Now, at day, touring her around, he only talked about himself, or said things that meant things about himself, and to make it worse, in the car he kept the radio turned on to a soft-rock station when she would have preferred new wave, and he talked on and on. Then in the hotel he was quiet. He said very little.

One night she said, "Tomorrow why don't we go to the Smithsonian. I'm dying to see it."

At first he said nothing. It was already on his agenda. He had wanted to surprise her with the Smithsonian as he had surprised her with everything else from the very start—himself to begin with, his generosity, warmth, passion, humanity, intelligence. The landmarks, those giant paperweights the Washington Monument, the Lincoln Memorial, they were as if they had sprung from his own mind. He had brought them to life for her at the same time that he had made statements about them, about war, about sex, about the humanness of
their namesakes. She was quiet much of the time but her attention never flagged. This was as it should have been. He wanted her not to ask questions and to make no requests, to be overwhelmed with his tour de force of travel guiding. She was young and tender and accepting. He needed her like this. Finally he said, "Did you think we weren't going to see the Smithsonian?" He turned away from her and lay awake for a long time.

Miraculously, he found a place to park beside the green, almost in front of the main Smithsonian building. She did not wait for him to open her door as he had been insisting on doing. She got out and began to walk toward the building. But quickly she felt his grip on her arm and he steered her away and across the green (he called it a 'quad,' drawing a clever parallel between it and their campus), dodging frisbees and conservatives and their dogs, and hurrying past a man selling balloons and a woman selling hotdogs. They reached the steps of the National Gallery and Professor Renfield said, a little grimly, "College girls want to see French Impressionists."

She wanted to see the space exploration exhibits and the "All in the Family" exhibit, and something to do with rural Americana if they had anything
like that. Most of all she wanted to see mounted animals. They held a peculiar fascination for her—their strangeness as artifacts out of nature. If she could have asked Professor Renfield something about that.... At school she had gone often to the natural history museum and looked at them. The stillness and readiness of the birds made her watch as still and poised as they were at the beginning edge of some flight. Pheasants, heads and tails lifted, wings half-spread, the sheen of lights on the feathers of their backs, and those small exact, discreet feathers with their tiny brown and black designs.... It was all so much more and so much less than in real life that she longed, watching it, for clarification and justification.

"Monet," he was saying, "Monet was obsessed with light. Look at his brushstrokes. See how every color is single and separate and how together, if you stand back like this, they form shapes and surface impressions. But you have to stand back, as though he saw up close what we have to put at a distance."

The painting was of a misty pond either in the morning or the evening. It was lovely. Professor Renfield pulled her all the way back across the
room, but she thought that was too far. Now the small picture was lost in its frame and lost on the wall with all the other paintings. It was better to stand close.

"But it is illusion," he was saying. "Monet was obsessed with the surfaces of things. As he got older his paintings become more and more obscured and blurred."

She was trying not to listen. Whenever he put his bearded face into her field of vision and touched her shoulder or her arm solicitously, she turned away, pretending to look at another picture.

"Hah!" he said. "Today his paintings are worth millions and all he was was a blind old coot! I mean it. He really was--some kind of progressive myopia. Take out your contact lenses and you see the same things he did! Up close!"

He went silent. Lana walked into the next room, Professor Renfield following her.

"Ah! Gaugin!" he said. But he fell silent again, not knowing anymore whether Lana was so interested in what he had to say. He wanted to say something about Gaugin's sexual life that would sum the painter up and dismiss him with one stroke. He suddenly couldn't think of what the stroke might be. Gaugin, who didn't care if the whole world
suffered as long as there were Belgian psychotics and Polynesian beauties—he would spill his seed and his paint in any adoring soul or soil. Soul! What did Gaugin know about the human soul that he, Renfield, did not? Look at his paintings. All surfaces. Gaugin painted people turning their backs on him. His Polynesian women may have been bare-breasted but they were hiding something in their faces, something Renfield was sure Gaugin did not understand if he even suspected it was there. And what did Gaugin know of beauty? Look at those fat-nosed women, blubbery, with skin the color of rotten fruit!

Lana's smooth white skin, her long, golden hair, her perfect legs, her innocent student's mind so ready to believe and love—Lana was moving away from him.

In the corner of the room Lana saw a man she had seen earlier in a hall when she was waiting for Professor Renfield who was in the rest room. The man was telling his family that he wanted to spend the day looking at paintings. Now he was alone and looking not at paintings but at another couple in the room. They were Polynesian. The girl was very pretty with auburn hair and white skin and a few pimples on her face. But she had the same broad
nose and widely set eyes, the same purity and knowledge, as the beautiful dark-skinned women in the paintings. She was sitting on the sofa in the middle of the room, a little impatiently, and pointedly looking away from the boy, dark-skinned, handsome, beardless, who was staring long and intent at the women in one picture as if waiting for them to move or tell him something, something about themselves or their painter or something about women or about genealogy. Something of a spiritual nature.

The girl finally stood and walked to the boy and took his arm. They looked at the picture together for a moment and then turned away and walked out of the room.

I watched them go, and then I looked at Lana and both of us thought how frightening and amusing everything is.
To memory and art experience is symmetrical. Symmetry is meaning. The proper events are properly juxtaposed or properly organized to imply continuity or other relationships such as parallelism or antithesis. Memory and art both do this. Both deal selectively and discreetly with tone, space, objects, persons, perceptions, volitions, responses, emotions, and accidents, until experience has not only a form, a beginning, a middle, and an end, but also an ethical or a metaphysical nature. The actions of art and memory are always motivated by the question, "What does it mean?" And then the available materials of experience are manipulated until it does mean something, or, if no meaning or only other questions can be found, then at least this is the reply resulting from the artificial symmetry. In this way the modern cynicisms, biological determinism and existentialism, are accounted for.

Fulfillment of meaning is brought about by the introduction of elements to each other that are tacitly significant by the fact of their selection. Presence, superimposition, juxtaposition, verticality against horizontality, a pattern completed or left
incomplete for the eye or the mind to finish, explode, deconstruct—all suggest meaning by the completion or noncompletion of a presumed progression toward symmetry. Thus with sublimation, repression, the fragmentation of personalities—the interpretation and treatment of them proceed from the common urge toward balance, toward replacing what is missing. Psychoanalysis determines the laws that determine the meaning of behavior, often defining one mental situation by the absence of its opposite: sanity is the fortunate absence of insanity; insanity is the unfortunate absence of sanity. Those in whom sanity is too completely absent to be restored must be put far enough away that we can contemplate them without being threatened by the absence of their sanity, and close enough that we can appreciate our own absence of misery that their absence of happiness shows us. For them not even the question of meaning can be properly asked.

Even the avant garde, the open-ended, the temporary in memory or art are avant garde, open-ended, temporary in relation to the inescapable if not always knowable absolute. What is temporary is so because it is abandoned, banished, or absorbed by truth. If something is open-ended then "Open-ended" is the temporary answer to the question of meaning. The absolute presupposed by any answer or question this way seals memory or art to themselves and seals them away from their sources in real life where the moment questions are asked, event already begins to verge away from itself and toward memory of art.

The metaphor of the fabric and the metaphor of the circle are identical. Both stand for the symmetrical nature of the utterance of
art or memory. The dropped thread is destructive of the woven, economical discourse; the wrong turn is destructive of the global reading. The balance, this symmetry, is essential if the work of art or the memory is to be contained in the finite mind, held and turned in the hands. That one should wander across the uncontainable surface of a globe, itself only a part of a larger system whose nature is not knowable, is inconceivable and intolerable.

Already the writer doubles back on himself with the contradictions "uncontainable globe" and "unknowable system" (how do we know it is a system?). This is the common predilection: even the inconceivable must only be described in terms of the conceivable. To call art and memory infinite is to flatter them and to flatter myself that I am so objective as to know beyond the limits of knowledge. Nothing can be known to be infinite. Infinity is whatever is beyond one's grasp—it is where the only completion lies, at the impossible end of things, and in completion is whatever is meaning. Symmetry is the device for the creation of wholeness out of what is fragmentary. It remains fragmentary and what is called meaning remains arbitrary and artificial.

One finds a coherence in the balance of the white sands, misty tidelessness, and invisible thunder of Florida's west coast with the gray sands, surging and violent surfs, and silent lightnings of the east coast. I see a completion, too, in this fragment which could have begun and ended beyond where it did to show its true formlessness but which was certainly selected for the very fact that it formally and only formally suggested a beginning and an ending. But meaning
do not see. Meaning is a tyranny which I have been unable to find a way of subjecting myself to. The definition and perception of Beauty, one end (where balance is the other) of art and memory, can not be so limited. If meaning is in the infinite beyond graspable experience, then Beauty must be also and be perceptible only in fragments.
Meditation

The case of Joseph Smith and the Early Church is a case of a multitude profoundly dedicated to an end that could not be known, to an incomplete and uncompleted gospel. Up until Joseph Smith’s death and beyond, the gospel as a doctrinal and human structure underwent a process of coming more and more into focus. More importantly, because the gospel is nothing if not a structure of promises, the text of an unfulfilled contract, and therefore the completion process was one that would never end, the main thing Joseph Smith sealed with his blood was a concealment of the gap, the open end, of the fulness of the gospel. The mortal degree of fulfillment possible, when finally brought into focus, should be seen to match the outline of that dark seal. The truth so many died for was not attained or was not yet attained. So many die physically for fragments and so many die spiritually of fragments. Questions and answers can be violent, bloodthirsty things.

... Maybe today it is mostly the blood of the spirit that is shed. And maybe a more common death is not a falling away from but a falling toward doctrine and continuing to fall. We are not so much less willing to understand the fragmentary nature of the gospel than in former times as we are impatiently materialistic, insistent that completeness manifest itself here and now in graspable terms, in goods and services, in capital gains, in assets.

... We are materialists, anxious to interpret the contract with God in material terms: wealth for tithes, health for austerity, posterity for chastity. Every act of obedience is a signature to a
clause. Any unagreed upon change in the structure of the institution that our religious language has come to identify exactly with eternal truth we take as a sign either of immanence or apostasy. Every failure or refusal to abide by the contract is a falling away. Any failure to receive the material rewards of compliance is necessarily a sign of unrighteousness.

Any Job would be patronized, counseled, and finally shunned as unworthy of the companionship of the wealthy in blessings.

[The man we will call X sees this. He looks at the walls surrounding him, the walls that he is supposed to be happy with because he has never been anywhere else and no one who is there now has ever been anywhere else. Those who have tried to go have found that it couldn't be done. X: Reality is a series of boxes, each box reflexively justified by the limits of our perception. Those limits lead us to postulate absolutes--absolutes are a need created by an unease with those limits, resolved when a governing principle is posited at the point where they end. We assure ourselves that it is something else, not ourselves, that has shaped and sanctified the box we live in. The governing principles and their governor are said to be beyond us, magical, more permanent than any single sensibility busy inducing truth from observation and obsessive need. The absolutes are the box, the conclusion, the postulation of Beauty from the adjective given to what we call beautiful, Fear because we are sometimes afraid, Friendship because there are friends. Death because people die. Finally, death which does not unlock the box but seals it, no more or less so if one's notion of death carries the consciousness beyond it
than if it is seen as a closure of consciousness. We have posited those absolutes between us and the governor we have posited beyond, and it is the nature of that governor to be able to reveal or to open our existences to whatever is really beyond the box. But we have obscured him for ourselves and we hope at least in death to go beyond and find out. But from within death where we are now, whatever we project beyond our experience remains within our experience. Within our box, within our perception, consciousness beyond death can be nothing different than consciousness before. We are within death. Death defines the barrier, death the limit, death defines us. The box we live in is a mausoleum.]

Joseph Smith's death was the signal of an immanent closure, at least the completion of the opening of a dispensation. An edifice was complete--a church and a mausoleum.

[So it goes, boxes within boxes. In an infinite series of identical expansions, differentiation between outside and inside hardly matters. You climb out of one box to find yourself in another, the first at your feet. You rebel against a structure of reality or find yourself enlightened beyond it. You find that reality must still remain structured, there is still a limit to perception, and no matter what the relationship of the new to the old structure, they are identical in still being structures of absolutes, and that is what you wanted originally to escape from. But that is always the point. You must grasp something to pull yourself out of one box into another. Absolutes are the graspable, absolutes are material. Infinity is beyond the grasp.
The nature of the network of definitions and doctrines—absolutes—that form the wall of his box is to demand conformity. If the box is square, then so are its occupants. If it is triangular, everyone must have pointed heads. Perhaps there are some who do not willfully refuse to conform but find themselves constitutionally unable to. Circumstances beyond their control have made it impossible for them to live in the box. The box does not recognize this. But tyrannized by absolutes, absolute demands, they know or fear that if they leave, having left they will have left nothing, and there is nothing to assure them (as only an absolute can) that in leaving they will find something unless what they find is what they have left behind. They may desire to find that the unstructured infinite can be grasped if one finds the proper moment to leap towards it, but if it can be grasped . . . it is not infinite. Hoping to place oneself in the infinite, one places the infinite in oneself, and then hopes to find in the box within an opening outwards and there to glimpse—chaos or transcendence? The distinction hardly matters.

The edifice metaphor is problematical: "Christ the cornerstone," a "foundation of prophets and apostles," and so on. The analysis this metaphor presents suggests a certain stratification, where, if one is to be found, it should actually be Christ's life below and Christ's death above, or his after-death; that is, the before part of the Church (its text, its permanent justification and ontology), and the after-text, the present of the the Church, its temporal ontology. The Church is a system, and, as all systems must have something in the center holding them together, that is if the Church's system is to be
compared to an edifice, it should be a mausoleum, a building created around the center of a corpse and made possible by the ideological presence of that corpse. Few if any religions are based solely or even most importantly on doctrine; it is event or mythology that justifies them. It is not primarily that the Church exists as a structure of doctrine, or that it exists in God's absence as the City of God or the Kingdom of God on earth that justifies or explains its founding. But Jesus \textit{said} do so and it was done as a result of that utterance. Atonement and resurrection are doctrine and are not the basis of the Church. This is not to underestimate the importance of doctrine, but only to say there is something more important: Christ's doctrine is sealed in his dramatic death; the Church begins with death, or at least with death at the center of a series of events. The New Testament might be analyzed in this light—as consisting of texts of justification or founding and texts of structure or completion (for once the edifice is begun it becomes necessary to produce the doctrine as a complete, encompassing system, which the gospels do not prove Christ himself to have done in his earthly teaching). The history and texts of this latter-day Church parallel the history and texts of that earlier one: we are re-justified by the violent death Joseph Smith said he knew he would die ("I go like a lamb to the slaughter") to testify and seal his testimony with his own blood.

The founding texts were written some time into the after-death existence of that Church. Undoubtedly, to a large degree they were selected and focused to justify the Church's structural developments,
especially against dissidents within the ranks who accepted the death of Christ as being of first importance but created with their own doctrinal systems (the struggle for power being one of the great incentives for discovering truth). Similarly, the founding texts of the present Church were selected, expanded, canonized in a way that not only gives the Church authority over its own protestants, but also separates the Church-following-Joseph-Smith's-death from the Church-before-Joseph-Smith's-death. We might see this more easily if our understanding of the entire history were not mostly determined by the later, posthumous, developments. Word of Wisdom, auxiliaries, some ordinances, protocol, acceptibility and frequency and institutionalization of certain spiritual gifts, rejection of others. Institutionalization is the key to materialism that separates us from the early spirituality and spiritualism. At some point in the early Church and the present one the new things written and taught cease to be scripture, are judged according to their conformity to earlier texts, and found to be either heresy or commentary. Those earlier texts are the institution. The institution as an edifice is a mausoleum centered on the existence and presence of the ever more decaying and obscure corpse of the beginning. As the beginning grows more and more distant, what becomes clear in our eyes is the rightness of calling the early Church "primitive."

[And it is this way that time always makes of the present a mausoleum around the past. Forgetfulness is a kind of worm and the ideological structure is a kind of bacterium reducing, transforming, and assimilating the institutionalized point in time. The event's
presence as a corpse continues as a justification, as a moment that explains the present and gives it "meaning." It can be pointed out as the premise for any course of action that is actually a play for power, the institution's desire, the desire of the worms and not the corpse. The ideological and absolutive structure, the fabric that is woven by the material that marks the end of thought (material as in materialism, the need to mark our limits by something tangible to linguistic thought) precedes and follows the institutionalized time which is both a birth and a death. Its precedence, the eternity of bacteria, dominates the transformation of the corpse, a process of assimilation, not of the bacteria into the corpse, but of the corpse into the bacteria. Eventually the bacteria also eat the worms.

[Worm, bacteria, box, mausoleum, fabric, circle. The metaphors will not fall together into some elaborate, coherent scheme. Each represents a field of meaning that does not correspond with but overlaps the others. The continuous overlapping puts us on a Mobius strip with our own box, we finally come to a situation in which walls of a box provide the illusion of a complete reality always by referring to each other, parallel, perpendicular, diagonal, as principles that form truth parallel, cross-referencing each other infinitely, or they provide apparent paradoxes (the diagonal view) only for a "new" idea to proceed at a new angle to unify them and create closure (so the "new" idea never proceeds farther than the walls of the box). Torus--the box can be climbed out of but only into itself--out the left and into the right, out through the top and in through the bottom. The material of truth can never be completed, can
never be true—Because there is always another box, another prison, waiting, we find ourselves confronting an infinity or an infinite regress of falseness.]

We traveled east to west, the direction the Church traveled, but we began with Carthage Jail and then continued to Nauvoo and through Missouri to Independence and peripheral points, and of course did not return as they did. In completing our own loop we burst through Joseph Smith's circle. Our last place was Adam-ondi-Ahman, a narrow wood, a long, narrow meadow with a single tree and then another wood. There a foundation of the houses of a couple of early apostles, a place where Moroni (or Mormon, I forget which and the label had been pulled down) was supposed to have built an altar. Without the aid of signs I found where I thought it must be. There was a farmer working in the tall corn at the bottom of the hill that held the wood, the meadow and the wood. A sign whose unintentional irony can't go unnoticed by Mormon eyes said, "Beware of poisonous snakes." Someone had put a dead possum in the turnstile leading to the first wood.

I have seen the plethora of holy places in Jerusalem, the several places where Jesus was buried, other places in Israel selected by the different religions for their holiness to history or doctrine. Not very many of the others have Gardens of Eden (though I'm sure a few do). In Jerusalem one feels it is a matter of some importance that one identify the place of burial, the place that marks the closure of one's doctrine's pretext or subtext as separate and unshared by other religions. To have one's own cavern is to be able to claim precedence, to have the real center, the real estate, that the others
lack. So not only is the primeval event important, possession of the place is important or where that is not possible, knowing the place and its hermetic significance. For knowing, the way the other's can't know, is the same as possessing. It was something of a disappointment to discover that Jesus' real sepulchre is visited by many Protestants who seem to know as much about it as we do. It is owned by the Baptists. It is good to learn that at least the truth of it was revealed by God to our own prophet, Harold B. Lee--at least that is the rumor. So we know while for others it can only be a matter of conjecture and tenuous calculation.

The specific mechanics of this mysterious process of revelation are our own, and hence we have the Garden of Eden and its environs where no one else would have bothered to look for it--smack dab in America. It does seem, from one point of view, a logical extension by inversion of the Puritan attitude toward the Wilderness that we should find a disheveled Paradise in the center of America. The American Romantics, laying aside prejudices against cultism and fanaticism, should have been pleased. Pioneers and Forty-niners, Turner thesis notwithstanding, should have been shocked to learn that they had passed what they were looking for a long piece back. Us Mormons went planning to come back. Myself, I found it a nice place, but not the spectacular, most beautiful (scenic) place on earth as I had heard reported. Virginia was nicer. Maybe we came at the wrong time of year.

What the right time of year is in Missouri is hard to know. Traveling through on short trips from Utah without time to adapt
(however long that may take), it may be there is no right time of year. Winter is never the right time in the temperate zones of farms and deciduous woods, and in the summer there is the humidity. Mists in the morning were as thick as fog, and in this strange, flat land you felt actively isolated, avoided by the landscape as you drove past small thick woods that emerged reluctantly and disappeared quickly. The humidity was the mist made transparent by direct sunlight, but the mist was still there, hot and wet. You walked through it and looked through it, and you also breathed it like a fish and put your sweaty hand through it to touch anything. It seems we touched each other less because of the clamminess. Fish rarely touch, even in crowded schools.

At the aquarium at Far West we swam in a square, pausing at each foundation stone of a never-built temple to read the Priesthood powers and keys represented by each. These were printed on plaques the way some gravestones are. Not very heartening. Some of us found this marine life intolerable and created a turbulence that others of us could not bear who were trying to find at least a cool inner shadowy stillness. Some of us can't breathe either water or air.

Traveler as landmark, spectator as spectacle. Always go alone, or with at most one companion. Where there are three or more somebody is going to figure out that two makes an audience and play to the galleries. Some people can compete with any landscape but a misty one, so some of my memories are misty. There must be a right time of year in Missouri. If there is it must be when you are there alone.

An object loses its discrete geometry. It loses its status as a
point opposite against which we are made aware of ourselves as points opposite. As they cease to be separate from us we stop being separate from them. This is familiarity. It is family, this result. My family is nobody but me; I am nobody but them, nonexistent except within a troubled entity, or nonexistent except for the trouble within that entity. Our house is our existential box. We rarely see one member of our family because he seems to have been born foreign to the absolutes we have made our home. We know this and consider it wrong of him. You can't be family and be known. Knowledge cuts you off and it cuts them off. What any entity must learn is that it can only be composed of parts that are not entities but only parts. What any part must learn and forget is that to help compose an entity it has to stop being one itself.

Here is some Einstein geometry for the individual soul: Your position relative to two different points is not identical to itself. Positions are beside each other. Position A is visible from point A, position B from point B, but position B, viewed from point A, is obscured by position A. The degree of obscurity depends on the angle of divergence between the points until point B is directly opposite point A at which time point B and position B are entirely obscured from point A by position A. Only position A knows position B:

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Point A ←→ X Position A X B Position → B Point
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Mother ←→ Child X Desire
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You may call Point A Church or Family. You may call Point B God.
or Rebellion.

The realest rebellion is the silent one that proves its position B's direct opposition to point A by holding its own point B in complete obscurity. When the rebellion becomes open, position B and point B become visible. The angle is reduced:

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{A} \\
\text{X} \\
\text{B}
\end{array}
\]

Overt rejection is necessarily a movement toward reconciliation. It is a kind of confession. Two positions, two points, one soul standing relative to two points finds itself troubled by consisting of elements that will not converge.

The above passage, "X Positions for the Soul," is my entry in the Hubbard Scrapbook Sweepstakes.
An object is a monument, a subject is a jail. A jail consists entirely of inner walls. A monument consists of outer walls. According to Mormon tourism theory a thing can be a jail and a monument simultaneously. I would have doubted this until I discovered Liberty Jail, broken and hidden on a hill in wretched little Liberty, Missouri. Guardians of the hidden shrine are more than willing to conduct you into the artificial cavern where the shrine is kept and where you are trapped into listening to the familiar polemic. (After Carthage and Nauvoo and Independence you are beginning to feel just a little bit like Sisyphus or something. You might as well be making license plates.) To stand inside with the scapegoat-mannikins and touch the wide, broken walls, you have to first listen to the tape, different from all the other tapes.

The fact is there is no Liberty Jail. The van climbs the sad little streets of Liberty, Missouri, and you look everywhere for a monument. Mom and Jill have been here before. They say you will be very surprised... Instead of what you expect of the Garden of Eden you always find a dead possum at the turnstyle. Liberty seems especially hilly for a Missouri town. Not much can be seen from any point. There is no Liberty Jail. In its place you find that popular Mormon icon, the visitor's center, anonymous (not folk-) architecture, inside bloodless sanitation. The resurrected body is made of flesh and bones, and I suppose the planning of these visitors' centers is informed by a sort of telestial anticipation, suggesting to gentle, gentile tourists that this may be as close to heaven as they will get. The Mormon pilgrim, walking the carpets and
in all the other shrines in unnoticeable, interchangeable details. You have to walk slowly around a carpeted circle to the descending stairs.

Smith did this very thing—walked luxurious circles and descended carpeted stairs, viewed the deep darkness of his future from the darkness of his history. His carpet ended him in a broken jail where his object-hood and his subject-hood collapsed either into transcendence or chaos, but something unknowable. "No man knows my history" because ultimately he did not partake of the dichotomy—body and blood, outside and inside. From his public he could have had anything (we have heard stories that he did have anything and everything from them but his institutionalized self is a barrier that divides us from his history). He walked among them, looping and binding them like sheaves with his darkness always in front of his listening to the same pitch again and again from quasi-geriatrics who attempt a jovial or reverent tone with varying degrees of success but usually not completely avoiding the funereal, the Mormon pilgrim tastes the tedium of that bland damnation. We must endure each other with a good heart to reach our goal. "In 1820 Joseph was hardly more than a tyke, only thirteen or fourteen, thereabouts, and he was all mixed up as to where he could go to find the really, really, true religion . . ." "You see, as Mormons we believe that when Jesus Christ was on the earth he established a Church with a specific and necessary organization with keys and authority . . . apostles . . . a living prophet . . . ." "You've asked this. Everybody has asked some time during their life, 'Where do I come from? Why am I here? Where am I going after I die? You've asked that haven't
head, this beyond-the-limits. He heard voices out of the blue as we are doing here, and I think they differed no more than these present ones do from shrine to shrine. He recorded one unified primeval text, selected, ordered, and interpreted later in the materialist mode so that a disunity, a dichotomy may come into existence, a tradition established, a power centered. He may have proceeded into a great light but there is a darkness he left behind him.

In the Mormon typology, Liberty precedes Carthage, meaning liberation and death are the same thing for Joseph Smith.

Descending into the darkness represents a liberation for Smith from the necessities imposed by a public. Consider the difference between the revelations he received on church and those intensely personal ones recorded you? Well, we have the answer." Well yes, so do we. We come from Murray, Utah, we're here to see the shrine, and with luck and caution we will arrive home safely, in one piece, so to speak, and not have to face the answer to the third question sooner than natural causes allow. Whatever happens, we could cut the suspense by thirty minutes or more if certain people would recognize the redundancy of proselyting the proselyted (we are the only ones here) and get on with the historical business at hand. Where in the hell is the jail? It turns out that what there is of it is in jail. A door opens and we are led into a holy of holies. The high level decision was that in order to create an environmental experience, help us relive to some extent the spiritual heights and physical depths, the unspeakable agonies and ecstasies of Joseph Smith's imprisonment(s), the jail would
in jail. Revelation implies a three-pointed X-position system. At one point is the public, someone that something can be revealed to, point A. At the center is X, consisting of position A and position B, the one who faces the public and reveals and faces away and conceals. Point B is what is concealed and what makes X stand beside himself.

Point B is God.

It must be that way. When you have a public, expectations to meet, revelation, you cannot reveal everything. What you conceal becomes yourself standing beside yourself. Death is liberation because we do not really know about it. It is not just another element in the network that makes the box. It is the only box we do not create. It is the real mausoleum. Its status as a monument is not known.

Joseph Smith is boxed in his own dichotomy as a man and a prophet. Not be restored, but should be left in its diagonally cut-away condition "as found," mannikins placed in langourous or raptured positions, and the whole thing surrounded by a dome-shaped room with an elevated, circular walkway, plush carpets, and state-of-the-art sound and lights. There is a prosy narration with prosy Crawford Gates-sounding background music and appropriately shifting, dramatizing colored lights. We are, as a missionary companion used to say of the Spiritual witness, overcome with whelm. The building seems tiny but the wooden floor that halves the building and the stone walls are enormously thick. The prophets incarcerated were cold and hungry and had very little room to move and almost no light. They have light now. It is no longer a jail. There is no parallelism of the jail wall and the monument wall, no inner and
Maybe he hears voices from beyond the box.

In the darkness of a jail he is closest to those voices.

He hears their clarity and violence, and longs for his release from the mausoleum.

Death is liberty for one man, closure for an entire society.

outer; they converge at the cut-away point and cancel. It calls to mind somehow the crannies and caverns in Israel, the birthplaces and sepulchres of the Savior. They are almost always indoors and even the place Harold B. Lee said was the real burial place ("This is the place" has become a real prophetic byline) is privately owned (by the Baptists) and fenced off. Even the Moslems have built the most fantastically ornate mosque around the stone where Abraham took Isaac to be sacrificed. An unsuspecting angel would knock himself unconscious on a great deal of marble and ivory and lapis lazuli and topaz before the blindly obedient hand could be stayed. By which time the knife would be plunging and sawing halfway across the throat. Enshrinement is the closure of function and event. It is an ensuring that, while we may come and pay our respects and exhibit
our devotions, the Great Event cannot and must not recur. Great events, burning bushes, resurrections, words of truth and mercy spoken to gentiles at wells, are spiritual and unbearable. Enshrinement is the heaping of enough material and misunderstanding around the spot, that when God is forced then to choose another place for his mysterious works our backs will be turned, we will be facing away toward where the past is institutionalized and laminated in colored lights. The shrine is almost always cancelled by its enshrinement.

This is the first shrine based on scientific principles, the circular walkway providing the orthographic and isometric views; the cut-away, the diagram view. The climax of the presentation is a descent to the bottom floor level. Another family has joined us earlier, a young family from Utah with several small children. Now the children cavort and
clamber on the walls and floor of the jail. I am skeptical of this shrine. Afterwards, the guide asks if we would like to see a fifteen-minute filmstrip about Joseph Smith's First Vision. We could hardly say no. We go to the film. We've seen it. We're already Mormons.
Here is where the temple will be built. Now it's a big grassy lot. Actually, they say the temple will more or less straddle the crossroads, meaning the little white Church of Christ tabernacle probably won't be in the way. Undoubtedly, though, they will find the proximity intolerable and move away. The only proof they have against oblivion is two surveyor stones found in the lot which it seems they own. An old man who is a guide and, we think, a Church authority, sees your Mormon smile under your shirt and launches into a defensive, incoherent justification.

It is not the liberty of death but its closure that is at issue here in Independence, where none of us can claim independence of each other due to a common origin and a common claim that Joseph Smith's death closed one of us in the box of the Gospel of Promise. Here we learn that possession is much more than nine-tenths of the gospel. What was satisfactorily closed? Apparently not the question of precisely what must be possessed. One life closes only to open a field of indeterminacy. This is the most interesting shrine--three tentative structures honoring what must cumulatively be understood as a question.

Of course, the Reorganized Church's magnificent structure, the beautiful tabernacle, will have to come down and be replaced with one of those plastic things we seem to have been building lately. It seems it hasn't been finished very long. Inside the meeting hall you are the fertilized speck in a robin's egg. Surrounding is the nest, a network of passages and ramps housing the Church. Here you are boxed and may well wonder if there is truth beyond the inner egg.

Better than two stones is the lineage. A perusal of the old prophets will show that one must have the genetic right to prophecy before one can properly wield the Ur Im and Thummin.
(Attempts—

1) The past and the future are a signifier and signified. The mark of the past is palpable: the depression that was the Nauvoo Temple, any reconstructible plans, fossils that can be fleshed by knowledge and imagination. The future's mark is imaginary and often contradicts real conditions. There is no reason why it shouldn't—the future can never be more than arbitrary. The present intrudes, indicating the future's impossibility. The future is impossible. In the past all real things are possible, the ways in which they are made to coalesce, not to contradict, are clearly shown. Clearly shown, like the possibility of a prophet's death sealing a testimony so clear that there will never again be a questioning. That there should be a questioning or a conflict comes from the idea of an absolute and the insistence that a text or a testimony introduce or give evidence of an absolute. Maybe the most that can be said about the past is that it presents something palpable for interpreting. In the future all unreal things are possible; all real things are impossible. We always interpret the future. But we can't interpret nothing, so there is a contradiction. What it comes to is that a narration or an analysis of what is to come is a fantasy with at best the past, an element utterly contradictory to it, as its center or cause. The future is a hoax. Any projection must be a continuation of systems in existence, language and history. Like science fiction, religion is an interpretation and a commentary on the past. All evidence is past.

2) On the one hand there are history, things, material, the palpable, the interpretable, things whose continuance or whose status
as causes and effects are provable, demonstrable, supposable. On the other hand there is the future, spirit, and spirituality—what is unknown, what encounters material barriers when an attempt at interpretation and transmittal is made. There is the public and the private in which this same difficulty occurs. The private cannot maintain its status as private when it is transmitted or even when it is interpreted since to a certain unavoidable degree interpretation must use systems received elsewhere that are universal so to speak, or public. Language is the greatest of these. The future can only be transmitted into the past and interpreted in terms of the past. The spiritual can only be interpreted in terms of the material, transmitted into the material. The gospel's best promise is a resolution of the conflict, a unifying or transcending of the dichotomy. But understanding this is beyond the material means at our command. Discussion being all material, it is one-sided and a way of ensuring misunderstanding.

3) In order for a power to be centered, a text is necessary—discourse, expansion, prescription, proscription, interpretation. The authorities take care of all this. Those who do this are authorities. But this interpretation is a continuous narrowing and shifting because the gospel is based on a future that can't be assimilated. None of what was promised is past. True, there are prophecies canceled in a way by their fulfillment; this is a fine thing and one of the ways faith is preserved, but the disparity in magnitude between the usually vague minor prophecies (Patriarchal blessings, etc.) and the specific, terrible and glorious projections of the eschatology, the Book of
Revelation, Matthew 24, Isaiah, is difficult to reconcile. Since foresight is impossible, everything is explained by hindsight. If a promise is given in a way that doesn't accurately describe the event or events it claims to project, the explanation is that whatever disparity there is between hope and fulfillment is a result of a limited consciousness attempting to understand a higher will. This rationale should then temper our eschatological expectations. After all, throughout the ages the Coming has been seen as much more immanent than it obviously was. Further, the Doctrine and Covenants defines "the day of this life," the expiration date of many of those prophecies, as the period from birth to resurrection, including an unspecified length of time in the after death Spirit World. Who can say in what manner those unfulfilled prophecies concerning the individual might be realized? That they will be realized we are sure; that we remain perceptually as we are we assume, and if that perceptual level is heightened it is only to see more clearly what we are already aware of--those absolutes that confines us to our box.]

There may be unity between spirit and matter. After all, what can't be seen or understood or communicated without material intervention existed before matter, as Genesis tells us. But there is no unity between spirituality and materialism. We have interpreted the revelations of Joseph Smith as if there were that impossible unity, as if matter and materialism were the same thing, as if there were no difference between the promise than an eternal soul will be a unity of body and spirit (the philosophy of eternal matter) and the belief that payment of tithing brings about prosperity at the same
time that it lays up treasures in heaven (the antiphilosophy of material). As if in God's bullish market a small investment strategically placed draws immediate returns allowing us to work a little easier at the same time as depositing funds in our eternal IRAs which grow and grow with interest. Those treasures. Money opens any door. In our retirement with the money we have laid by we will travel a little bit, take a luxury liner to the really big tourist attractions of the universe, relax and tan on Andromeda's sunny beaches, hitch on to a quasar and go space skiing. Maybe we can buy that remote cottage or a house on Kolob's East Bench and take up the appropriate hobbies like pottery. The pots that crack in the kiln or otherwise don't work out we will throw away and call "earths."

When religious obedience is a strategy, eternity becomes a science fiction. What we know and what we desire constantly erode what we hope. If we must know what we hope for, and if we must interpret the future, we can only hope for matter, and we can only see the future as a kind of past. When we express the spiritual that we hope for, the spiritual becomes matter; in other words, it becomes words, language, a system that claims to pre-exist understanding and to pre-exist matter or to be a simultaneous cause of our understanding and of matter. You can't get to what there was before language because you only have language to get there and so language claims the right to contain and control not only what it brings into existence, but what preceded it and will outlast it. Language only brings language into existence. Language is the torus, the Mobius strip, the hollow, self-absorbed tyrant masquerading as meaning. Language is the
vehicle and the barrier to the meaning that may be beyond it. There is a struggle with this in scriptures: It is explained that spirit preceded matter in all cases (Moses 3:5), and it is clear that matter preceded earthly event (Creation comes first and then the rest of the Bible) and that event preceded text. The notable exception is prophecy, but is this what is meant by "In the beginning was the Word"? Text was in the beginning. Prophecy is preceded by revelation, so text must be in the middle as prophecy as well at the beginning and the end.

It is significant that the Bible ends with prophecy. A seeming inviolable text standing between a First Cause and a Final Effect, but still the scriptures ultimately submit to the insistence of language to subsume the primeval text, to interpret it, to make it meaningful, to harrow it, make it ambiguous and almost irrelevant. Paul's precedent proves to dominate John's example. Paul interprets (and since he is the authority who will stop him?), so Augustine does and Aquinas does and anybody else does, either as an authority to define orthodoxy, or as a layman to demonstrate orthodoxy, limits of canonization notwithstanding. When a text, like the Revelation intervenes between a promise and its fulfillment, where can it go? What does it mean? Each new text only marginally interprets the primeval text; more accurately, it interprets the texts that precede it that interpret the primeval text. This process of interpreting interpretations naturally results in a narrowing and in disagreement. It results in protest because interpretation gives power to those who interpret and those who allow the interpretation. The narrower the
interpretation, the more brittle. The institution it justifies must break or split. Now, who can say what meaning is?

There is something of this happening in the years following 1844 and its traces are still found in Nauvoo and Independence. The narrowing of the primeval truth as expressed in the primeval text, the layering of interpretation, the misunderstanding and the material that subsumes and assumes the form of what may or may not have existed (eventually there is no way of knowing), necessitates not protest but restoration. But how is truth to be restored except through text and how is it to be administered except through authority? How is past history to be avoided? It is not and it was not. The dispute over text and authority began even before the first man who revealed without interpreting died. But afterwards it created institutions still in dispute. Who will hold the power? According to restored truth it should be the one who continues to reveal truth without interpretation. According to the restored truth, if there was a restoration and if the truth remains, then the restoration was not a moment, but was and will be the entire period during which the truth remains. It is not an event but a process. If there is one truth, there is one authority—he who reveals supported by those who understand and accept. This everybody in these disputed and divided shrines agrees with and each contending faction harks on it continuously as if it were not the particulars that divide them but truth. If everybody is telling the truth then not everybody can be serious about it. Obviously all but one can only be contending for power. Or maybe everybody is doing only that. It cannot be pointed
out that in any one of these churches the need isn't felt to know more than has been revealed and that as a consequence interpretation has not taken place that can't be regarded as part of the true gospel.

At Nauvoo, the Reorganized Church has seen fit to contrast the green, shady old town with a strikingly sophisticated, ultra-contemporary visitor's center. I didn't take any pictures or describe it well in my journal, but I remember whiteness and what we called at the time incongruity. We passed by, a bit rushed for time, and saw it from a block away without stopping. We only commented what a shame it was that those Reorganites couldn't get it right but had to mar the view with such a...such a what? ... Eyesore? But it was beautiful. Imposition? Our premise was that the restoration of Nauvoo should create the illusion of time not having passed; we should feel for a while we were the earlier Saints. We should absorb and share the lifestyle of what really must have been a time and a Church much different from anything we could imagine. With our preoccupation with visions we will envision himself, Joseph Smith, walking among adoring crowds, healing the sick, giving courage, discoursing brilliantly and with the Spirit on the mysteries. He catches sight of us and the light in his eyes intensifies. He approaches us and extends his hands and clasps ours warmly. We feel the virtue there. He looks directly into our eyes and says simply this: "The Lord is well-pleased. Carry on." Is this the purpose of restoration? Is this the necessity of illusion? Restoring the past seems to insure the Impossibility of the recurrence of any great event because it is a kind of denial of the future. Does anybody contend that Mormons can't
be ethno-centered pragmatists? Is there any reason to believe the Reorganized Church couldn't as easily have got the idea of using contemporary architecture from us (see Liberty Jail, the Independence visitor's center, any historical temple square, any annex to the old buildings--Carthage Jail, for instance) as from anybody else, God included? There was a time the Lutherans went in for this sort of thing without, in my experience, much success. We criticized their eyesores and now are building our own. The Reorganized Church's visitor's center is not an eyesore. In its way it reminds us of the distance between the present and the past better than the cameras and the roped off rooms and the supercilious missionary guides do. After all, Nauvoo is about architecture, the man-made holy spaces and the relics that witnessed the events. The relics are holy because they witness without interpreting or translating. They are holy because of their continued presence, and because they were there and they do not say anything about it. They let us do the talking and the pretending we speak for them. They are devices of perspective.

We have spent money on our own building too. I suppose you could call the style neo-historical. The common, flat, ranch-style roof has been abandoned here in favor of the sloping style. The building is made of expensive reddish bricks. Of course a real period structure of its size would have been stone or wood and wouldn't have had as many angles and juttings. Here we see a building suitable for the tourist who wants to relive the past and the tourist who wants to explore it or at least regard it from the perspective of the present. The building is lovely and diplomatic. Why is it I feel such a misfit
at times in such a diplomatic church? We all have these moments, I hope.

I'm not certain why they chose Nauvoo for the sculpture garden tribute to womanhood. Maybe because the Relief Society was founded here. Maybe to keep women out of sight where they belong, like in the Book of Mormon. More Mormon babies have been born in Salt Lake, more cookies baked, and quantitatively more compassionate service given, than in Nauvoo. It may have been felt that Salt Lake has enough of a concentration of shrines and memorials. To add more would be to hide them among the skyscrapers, the Church Office Building among them, that hide away even the temple. Most of the shrines in Salt Lake really are secondary compared to the Illinois-Missouri sites; consider the Lion House, This-Is-The-Place Monument, the mobile Pioneer Village. What great events occurred in these places are rather pale in comparison. At Nauvoo the sculpture garden has little to compete with since restoration has been mainly of scattered buildings. (Actually, I have learned that there were great spaces between buildings originally.) You walk a long ways to get from place to place; nothing competes with anything else; there is no real hierarchy of points of interest. (One, of course, is obligated to see the temple site, and one wishes one hadn't arrived too late in the day for a tour of the Joseph Smith house, owned by the Reorganized Church.) The sculpture garden stands outside all this: it is not historical, even if it does show the ages of womanhood. This organizing principle is beside the point next to the excellencies of some of the individual works. There is a great contrast between Dennis Smith's gently
humorous, poignant sculptures and Virginia Tanner's stately creations. Until this commission she had been mostly a miniaturist working in porcelain. Mom has some things she has done (they are friends), and the delicate detail, fingers, lace, is impressive. It is interesting that the miniaturist style translated into over-scaled bronze should look so heavy. It certainly finds a dignity there not to be found in the plaster reproductions (in several sizes) the Church is marketing without the consent or cooperation of the artists. I remember machines in amusement parks and zoos where you could make plastic animals in molds by depositing a coin and pushing a button. You find about the same definition and proportion in the Church's womanhood figurines as you got in the plastic animals.

I hadn't intended to criticize. The bones aren't really mine to pick; marginally troubling actions and attitudes come from above, so I am in no position to criticize. The processes that find illuminating relationships between events, between facts, finally between words and groups of words, my own included, are specious. Assurance on the basis of what has been spoken or written, I think, is the blindest faith. Faith, really is all there is, at least if there must be a metaphysical unity to the universe.

Still, I am skeptical, healthily, I hope, of models and icons of virtue. I avoid the badly conceived and executed murals and displays on the main floor in the visitor's center. In an obscure corner of the second floor I find framed photographs of the Relief Society's compassionate service. Regarding the coiffures, the posed attitudes, the humble smiles of the well-dressed angels of mercy hovering over
their weakly smiling victim, I think how dated the picture is. Why, with all the money they've spent on the building and its furnishings, did they have to drag these out of the bottom of some forgotten heap in some old meetinghouse library? But then I realize it is not the picture that is dated but the women in it. There is a self-importance in the piled hair, the not quite natural stances, the forced sympathy in the eyes and the vacancy in the smiles, and an uneasiness. There is an even greater uneasiness in the woman in bed who has had to get her hair done and put on makeup and clean, modest, expensive-looking bed attire, the kind Queen Elizabeth wears to public functions, and change the sheets and put on the bedspread bought just for this occasion. She is in her late sixties. The exertion has brought roses to her cheeks, something to be glad about because she knows these pictures will be held up in countless Relief Society and Sunday School lessons throughout the Church to illustrate some point on compassionate service. So she appears to be in the bloom of health, and the women standing seem to be improvising something for the camera the way actors are supposed to do in crowd scenes when the stage directions read "crowd murmurs" and the crowd does: "Watermelons, watermelons." At the same time these ladies are trying to emote the radiant concern all the way down to the very last drop. It's all mixed up and they don't know it. The ladies are dated but the picture could have been taken last month. Originally I thought, This is where Barbara B. Smith and her friends get their models—the old pictures. But then I wasn't sure if that wasn't Barbara B. Smith herself with retinue pretending to pay a surprise visit. A style of service seems to have emerged whole in the 1950's or early 1960's and now whenever
Sisters bring the casseroles around or greet each other at Church, especially after an absence, or deliver lessons in culture, homemaking, spiritual living or what not it is just as if it had been back then. There is a little bit of Florence Nightingale, a little bit of Carrie Nation, very little Susan B. Anthony, a lot of Eleanor Roosevelt, and really quite a bit of Eliza R. Snow who trailed her poetic sensibility like a wedding train. I imagine Eliza R. Snow was uneasy and self-important with her black silk and pedestrian rhymes.

Self-importance is more important to lesser beings than the self-important. The icon is materialistic and so is the role model, the touchstone. The spirit cannot be imitated but the demeanor can. In an institution the necessary presence of a hierarchy unavoidably produces a system of icons and imitations. It is a system as much encouraged by those who will be imitated as by those not self-reliant enough to trust their own spiritual natures. Barbara B. Smith wants to be imitated as much as she imitates.

Again I hadn't meant to criticize. I only felt it was my duty, as it is any conscientious traveler's, to discover the hidden or little know fact that illuminates and brings the event or place alive. We call these "points of interest." The Relief Society picture of compassionate service in the Nauvoo visitor's center is a "point of interest."

One other point of interest: Something that has to be endured by the pilgrim in Nauvoo is the missionary tour guides. The missionary who doesn't see sincerity as a knack to be acquired by art and practice, for instance by following all the counsel in The Greatest-
Salesman-in-the-World, is a rare one. Our guide at the Heber C. Kimball house was insufferable--patronizing to the women and children, and superficial with everyone, one imagines, to his dying breath. "How much do you think this doll cost back then? You will never guess in a million trillion years... Do you know how much it would cost today... You wouldn't want to play with anything that expensive!" Golly! I guess not! But thanks for bringing the past alive for me so vividly! Anyone who has ever touched paper money can't help but be brought to tears by your approach, or at least be awestruck. As if the mortal Joseph Smith himself were to walk into the room this very moment. But he's not going to, so we've got the next best thing--a hot stuff missionary who ought to be shot. "Don't touch that, Honey!" he says in a high, breathless voice. "You wouldn't want to break it! In a minute I'll give you something kiddies love to look at! I'll bet your mommy will appreciate that!" Then an ingratiating conspiritorial look at the audience. He thought he was doing a bang up job.

In the Brigham Young house I am at the tail end of a group being guided from room to room. The house is rather cramped; obviously it dates from pre-polygamy days. Turning around to see who is passing behind, I see a missionary guide having just finished a tour going to the front of the house to organize another one. He glows with an inner assurance that his holy fatigue and his determination to press on with an about-my-father's-businesslike energy have sanctified him. The inflated sense of personal worthiness puts some of these guys on a higher plane than the rest of us where they express an attainment of
greater authority than most others even of their colleagues are
willing to acknowledge or claim for themselves. I can hardly believe
it when he winks at me. He winks at me with a wink that could mean
almost anything but actually means almost nothing. Maybe it is
conspiratorial in recognition of the Mormon smile under my shirt (it
is a white grubby shirt with the top of the collar badly worn by my
scruffy whiskers) saying we can communicate above and beyond these
plebians, or that we share experience unknown to them (I doubt it); or
maybe there is some irony in the wink: "Your light has so obviously
dimmed. You are fallen from heights so dizzying I have to wink to keep
from falling myself." (You can avoid Icarian vertigo by closing one
eye to inhibit depth perception.) I am the one who feels the vertigo.
The sheer gratuitousness of the act that fails, whatever its intent,
to include me (I refuse to be included) and that, in fact, excludes
everybody by its superiority (only the superior can afford not to
communicate, to be supercilious), embarrasses me so deeply that I step
backwards and shudder—not in disgust, but in sheer sheepishness. I
have never felt such a blush, from the scanty, bristling hair on my
head to the back of my knees. I am not sorry in the least to have
been a missionary but I am embarrassed for the alienation from reality
all missionaries experience in varying and usually unconscious
degrees. I am embarrassed for the things that alienation makes them
do. Then I think of the gray beach at St. Augustine where I walked
with Paul and Jill in the late afternoon, and of the boy, the young
man, who passed us with the gray-haired man, and of the sad, slightly
embarrassed look he gave me. The older man seemed happy enough,
vacationing with his "friend," possibly selected from several respondants to an add in the personals, first meeting a rendezvous at a certain corner. He was getting what he wanted, fulfilling his fantasy at no great cost. What is money next to desire except the most convenient means of achieving satisfaction? But for the other there is no honor in being the unreciprocating object of desire, and still less in remuneration. There is only expediency and experience of the ironies of existence. But the look meant everything. It included me because I felt its meaning and was prepared to understand it without first referring it to the gulf that separated us. So there was no gulf. We are beings trapped in a confusion of desire and necessity and pursued by ... conscience? Heaven's hound? Death? Paul and Jill did not see it, although I think the look was meant for them or was to have been passed on to them. Maybe I have done so.

Marble clouds vaulted the sky. My siblings jumped in the ocean. Later that night there was lightning but no sound beyond the earth-bound sound of the surf. It was mysterious. The code was unbreakable.

The code was unbreakable because there is nothing to translate it into. There are few who will see there is something not a prison or a monument, not canceled but beyond those limits of our conceptions, beyond the mausoleum. Because something happens in the mausoleum, the mausoleum gives it meaning. But something beyond the mausoleum refuses to order, refuses to mean or give meaning. It is neither chaos nor higher order, neither beautiful nor ugly, neither past nor future. It binds us either in our desperation to avoid it or in our
desperation to embrace it. One is tempted to say it is Fear and Love and God, but if it is, it is not the fear and love and god we have invented but the Fear and Love and God that invented us. Not the words printed on our prison walls but what burns outside. Words--our invention to avoid truth. In the beginning was not the word. We only say so because we have to say something so that we don't have to know, or so that we can forget, what was in the beginning.

I guess this is where it all comes apart, or this is the point beyond which I cannot go. In the mausoleum we call going beyond blasphemy or transgression or sacrilege. But these only exist because there is a system to transgress--only the system crushing us gives transgression a meaning. Transgression does not transgress then; if it exceeds our perceptions or our limits there is nothing beyond to make it mean. Transgression returns without having transgressed. Afraid of it by its other name, "sin," and not really inclined to mysticism, I turn back with feeble acknowledgement that when all this ceases, something not dependent on it continues, and feeble irreverence because of my lack of nerve or intellect. I will flounder awhile in the darkness perception has given me. But then I think I will return again to the limits, the end, and finish in a silence that is not opposite or denial but whatever lies beyond and flows between these words ignorant of them, unattached but compelling, denying them real or lasting meaning. The end is a death and whatever follows I cannot speculate but only hope it fills me beyond the need to understand.

I think maybe there are gaps in the wall that would dissolve the
jail we hold by will, but the materialistic positing of absolutes far short of the real truth is a need to shore ourselves against the intolerable. What burns on the outside can burn on the inside because there are gaps like the window Joseph fell through when he died and that death meant not just the closure of the beginning of the process of restoration, but the paradoxes it sealed unresolved until there are no more jails and monuments and not just the paradoxes but the unspeakable, the wind that will blow away the mausoleum, the fire that will burn it, the salt that will melt it. That death has given rise to shrines but has also made them fail; the unknown history has made us need to touch and see and smell and taste what is known; it has made us need to pretend that we don't hear silence beyond the tape recordings.

We sit in the room in the Carthage Jail where the shootings took place and listen to the tape recordings we've heard before dramatizing the events, held in bondage by the redundancy of the only things we are capable of understanding. But I think we hear the silence.
Application

Some time before arriving at Carthage, we were driving through Illinois when I found on the Missouri map that Far West is indeed in the far west of Missouri. In the fifth grade I had all the states and their capitals memorized and knew where they were all situated and where the major rivers and mountain ranges were. It was easy. Everything had a right-left, up-down orientation. But that small geographical talent has atrophied along with a lot of other things and now I realized the confidence left over once the skill was gone had led me into a blunder. What is more embarrassing than the blunder is the attitude behind it. It was not what in school is called a bad attitude, the kind that goes down on your permanent record. But it was a pretty rotten attitude. It was a kind of missionary self-righteousness. The story is a long one:

Elder Salt and I were in Newcastle, a steel town on the edge of Natal and very near the flat, empty Orange Free State. The steel industry was new in the city and because of it in five or six years the population had grown from about five thousand to nearly thirty thousand. To the south, east, and west attractive suburbs of small white house, all owned by the steel company, spread across the low hills. President Van Staaden was a steel company executive and owned his own large white house in a neighborhood of steel company white collar employees and executives. The Newcastle Branch met in the dance studio Van Staaden had built for his daughter in his backyard next to the swimming pool. The branch was small and seemed to be growing smaller. At least the attendance of the adults was dropping
off rapidly while the number of children remained constant. Because there were children and because it was the Sabbath, the Van Staadens always righteously locked up the swimming pool when we met. The Van Staadens were subtle people, though not subtle enough not to seem somehow ostentatious in their observances. You could never put your finger through their subtlety onto that ostentatiousness.

The Sermon on the Mount says, "Whosoever shall say, Thou fool .. .." I will not call President Van Staaden a fool. That will be my observance. But what I will say is that he exemplified a certain Afrikaans elitism, a deeply rooted Calvinism, a class justification by faith in the South African socio-political structure, a Dutch burger pride, a conviction that the outward material and racial evidences bespeak an inner circle of grace and exclude people of lower income and authority, laborers, all colored races, the English, and new converts. Leave the shades drawn on the benighted. He very quickly and quietly got rid of the Van Rooyens, who were blue collar, was in the final stages of cleansing the branch of the Andrews (English and blue collar), and was even elbowing out his own counselor, Brother Tyson, and Brother Tyson's family. Their problem was that they were sweet and provincial, and that Brother Tyson tended to sympathize with the ousted members. I can't explain well how Van Staaden did it, but his method was very efficient, as if the result of years of target practice. When he was not subtle he was audacious, but always indirect. He made insinuations to the children or friends of his absent marks, or he was superior and critical behind a spiritually enlightened face when his marks were there. His aim was true. He said what he meant but protested that his purposes were holy, for the
good of the unmotivated and secretly sinful. What, for instance, were the Andrews parents up to on a Saturday night that they couldn't get out of their bed and come to church on a Sunday morning?

The Andrews were a group of large, boisterous, canny people. The girls were dark and clever. The boys were blond and red-faced and innocent. When Brother and Sister Andrews missed a few Sundays, Van Staaden spoke in Sacrament Meeting about how weak and insincere members were who could take such a cavalier attitude towards participation. We did not need people who could destroy our unity like that so they might as well stay away. As if his own attitude were not equally cavalier toward them. But he was angry at not seeing signs and motions; that is what he was so careful to exhibit. He wanted the evidences that he was supported. That is what activity meant to him. What did certain people have to hide that they should not come and join with the rest of us in worship? All the Andrews children were present except the oldest son, who was away serving an apprenticeship in electronics.

President Van Staaden was riled when he learned shortly after that Mother and Father Andrews had arranged through the missionaries for an interview with the mission president when he was coming for branch conference. They had not gone through proper channels, and now if Van Staaden dropped a bug in the mission president's ear about the Andrews' state of worthiness it would seem too desperate an action. At some level he knew their grievances well enough to know that they were a threat to his position, but he probably convinced himself that what he would have liked to have done was put things in their proper
perspective for the mission president so he would not be influenced by Andrews' distortions and half-truths.

Sister Van Staaden was also an elitist, perhaps even more so than her husband. I think she even prodded him a bit a la Lady Macbeth. She was an ambitious and hysterical woman and, as we gradually learned, seriously unbalanced. Much of what her husband did, especially in the crisis that was developing, was done to try to keep her stable, or as stable as possible. This made them both crazy. Van Staaden's ambition was not balanced or canceled by his desperation on his wife's behalf. It was complicated by it. They both got more hysterical, he in his quiet way, she in her anguished, violent way.

I made her hysterical more than once. In fact, I feel that somehow I contributed to the hysteria that, when she came under the pressure of reprimand, would not allow her to respond rationally and ended up getting her disfellowshipped.

I remember twice especially because I was in the wrong, once miscorrecting her and once misjudging her. I remember them I suppose because I still feel defensive. But I was acting the way I had seen and have since seen many missionaries act.

Sister Van Staaden taught the Gospel Doctrine class, our only adult Sunday School class, out of of Eldon Ricks's scarifying, speculating, smug Doctrine and Covenants Commentary. Her historical backgrounds were always muddled and her doctrine... well, hysterical... and irrelevant. We missionaries often corrected her. Being lifelong members of the Church and American, of course we were in a much better position to dispense the finer, but vital, points of
doctrinal and history to the class. We were often amused at Sister Van Staaden's overreactions. But she would lay low to trip us up too. Once she called on me to read Doctrine and Covenants 130:20-21 prior to her misinterpreting it for the class. Surprisingly it would seem for a missionary, I chose the acceptable but lowbrow pronunciation "irrevocably": "There is a law irrevocably declared in heaven..." and before I could go any further she cut in shrilly and triumphantly: "Oh! Oh, Elder Richards who knows so much and has a bachelor's degree from Brigham Young University has incorrectly pronounced 'Irrevocably!!"

"Well, excuse me Sister Van Staaden, but if it matters at all, I think you'll find a decent dictionary will allow you both pronunciations."

"You show me! You show me! I'm sure I wouldn't know from which dictionary..."

"Webster's Third International..."

"Elder Richards, I wonder if you will accept the authority of a college professor in English at the University of Pretoria? We lived in Pretoria, you know, and we went to the university professor at the University of Pretoria and asked him because we very specifically wanted to know, we asked him how is this word pronounced? Irrevocably or irrevocably? How should we pronounce this word? Because we want to pronounce it correctly, don't we Elder Richards? A college professor in English and he said 'irrevocably,' the correct pronunciation of this is 'irrevocably.' What do you think of that, Elder Richards? We have never known you to be wrong before. Just
what do you think of that?"

""There is a law irrevocably declared in heaven before the foundations of this world upon which all blessings are predicated, . . ."

After all, what did such small, picayune things matter? And I was not wrong!

But I miscorrected her when, on another Sunday, I told her that the town was called Far West, which I believe is the case. But I said it was the name of a town and therefore not necessarily of a region, not "the far west of Missouri" as she had said. I had a notion, quite false, that Missouri was south of Illinois on the east side of the Mississippi River and that the Saints had crossed the Mississippi only once, fleeing Nauvoo. Sister Van Staaden had Missouri on her map south of Illinois but west of the Mississippi. She was right, and I didn't look at a map and discover it until six years later driving with my family through Illinois toward Missouri and Utah. What's more, Far West was in the far west of Missouri. In her own cracked way she had been right. She had been only slightly mixed up thinking it was a region and not a town. The trouble was, she had been corrected so many times on so many Sundays that her hysterical overreactions were becoming longer and longer. I have never seen someone become so agitated over a simple geographical setting-straight. This was one of her longer overreactions. What a silly woman! I thought how difficult she must be to live with.

Finally on the Sunday a week before branch conference, Sister Van Staaden informed the Gospel Doctrine class that a certain verse in a
certain section of the Doctrine and Covenants meant that children who die before the age of accountability will be resurrected in the same form, at the same age, at which they died, and parents will then raise them to maturity in the Millenium.

I thought we should not adjourn misinformed on this point. I raised my hand and, when called on, said, trying to avoid the slightly ironic tone I had begun to use with Sister Van Staaden, "When President N. Eldon Tanner was in Capetown meeting with the priesthood there, I was present, and somebody asked exactly that question--Will children be resurrected in the form they were in when they died? And he only said, 'It has not been revealed.' And they tried to ask him two more times, rewording the question, and both times he just said exactly the same thing, 'It has not been revealed.' So I guess, Sister Van Staaden, that while it may be true, the only answer that can be given is that there is no answer. It hasn't been revealed according to President Tanner."

Whatever self-containment she was capable of we had seen the last of from that point. Even when she finally went silent the next Sunday, it was a terrible, mad silence. She screamed at me. She ranted and raved. She tried to rally the class against me but they were too confused to take a side, or at least they weren't taking sides, not outwardly. There was half an hour left of lesson time and she took it all for her squall, her diatribe against missionaries and how could they send them out in the field preaching false doctrine and what were the parents and the children supposed to do, what promise of joy was there for them, they might just as well throw the gospel to
the Gods, forget faith and obedience and hope and charity and not try to live the Word of Wisdom or keep the commandments because what would they be keeping them for? Nothing! Nothing at all! She could show us any number of general authorities' writings and discourses in which the doctrine was made plain, yet here was the elder, here was Elder Richards, claiming that children who die unbaptized would not be resurrected. He might as well be a Jehovah's Witness. Were we sure he wasn't one of them? That was what they believed, wasn't it?

I didn't know then what was going through her mind. Now I think I do and I think the whole question, not of doctrine but of interpretation, of stratification, of perverting the primeval with the institutional, is disgusting, and my part in the situation was disgusting. Sister Van Staaden in many ways was a disgusting woman—she was disgustedly ambitious and elitist and muddle-minded. But it was not ambition that made her rage. You can't get rid of missionaries no matter what you do. She was desperate and unhappy and she needed to believe what she was teaching us, and she needed us to ratify her doctrine.

She did not come to Sacrament Meeting that day. The following Saturday the whole mission presidency came. This is often a sign of impending upheaval. They listened to the grievances of the Andrews and the Tysons and some of the still-active but secretly offended and angry members. And the Van Staaden camp was allowed its defense. Nobody was blameless. The Van Staadens were called in and asked how they thought things were running in the branch. The Van Staadens had a pretty good idea of what had already been said in the room. The
people they had alienated felt exactly the way they were supposed to feel, but they had done what they were not supposed to do—defy the authority of the Van Staadens by not keeping their grudges to themselves. I think the Van Staadens had not realized that you can't govern the absent. The Van Staadens were so extremely, defensively nervous when the mission president asked his question, Sister Van Staaden could not have been expected not to fly off the handle. I imagine if she had kept her composure things would have turned out very differently: very little would have happened. The Van Staadens would have been mildly scolded and admonished. That's all. They would have found it hard to take, but they would not have told anybody about it. But she flew off the handle. She would not be corrected any more and she knew she was about to be. But the more she resisted correction in this case, the more there was to correct. Finally she refused to sustain the mission presidency and as a result was released from any and all Church positions. In support of his wife, President Van Staaden asked to be released; he may have thought it is better to resign than be fired but the mission presidency had intended to do no such thing. They had come hoping to rectify matters while leaving the branch structured as it was, but they agreed to release President Van Staaden and this angered both of the Van Staadens greatly.

That night at the Newcastle Holiday Inn the mission presidency and the missionaries had a four-hour meeting over how the branch would be reorganized. Elder Salt was called to be the new branch president right off the bat. The rest of the decisions, who was to be counselor, clerk, who was to teach Gospel Doctrine, etc., were
political and that is why the meeting took so long. I had little to do, so I sat on a chair thumbing through scriptures trying to find some interesting passages. According to 1 Kings 13:27: "And he spake to his sons, saying, Saddle me the ass. And they saddled him."

President Van Staaden did not come to branch conference the next day. Sister Van Staaden came and refused to sustain the leaders. This was her hysterical silence. She was released from all branch responsibilities. It was a tense meeting, but well-attended.

Since he was released, Van Staaden later in the day called the mission presidency and informed them that he would have to start charging the branch rent on the dance studio that he well knew the branch could not afford. He later relented, but for my remaining two weeks in the area I did not see him or his wife at any branch meetings on their own property. They had thought that at least all they had given the branch in goods and services would ensure their continued ascendancy.

The mission president asked me if I wanted to stay in Newcastle. He was a new president and was cultivating a new guard in his own image, which in his own mind was the first truly righteous missionary in South Africa. He was letting us old guardians of sloth and light-mindedness out easily by sending us to where we wanted to go and not expecting too much of us. I told him I preferred not to stay in Newcastle. I liked Capetown or Port Elizabeth or Rhodesia but couldn't stand the pressures and conflicts of Newcastle.

We were glad when the Van Staadens were released. We had wanted this. We had been very cooperative in engineering things so that it
could happen. We had happily arranged interviews with the mission presidency for any and all disgruntled members, which of course we should have done but maybe not so slyly and happily. Our job had been to reactivate the branch while the Van Staadens were being more successful at inactivating it. We wanted them out; we did not think they would change after just a good talk with the mission presidency. They had done things they were doing in Newcastle in Pretoria. We were not even wrong in wanting them out, I think, but our motives were impure. We were missionaries, for heaven's sake, and they were not helping us. We had a right to demand their cooperation and they did not give it. It was not that they were not helping the Lord—they were not helping us in our spiritually superior position, in our clairvoyance, our noble objectivity, our sanctified, sacrificially, gladly suffering selves. We wanted to see them get their just deserts, we wanted to get them good. We were such know-it-alls (I mean myself when I say "we"; Elder Salt was an entirely more detached and altruistic person); Sister Van Staaden was a desperate person, and she ended up disfellowshipped, and I feel I had something to do with it.

I do not read people any more; I don't trust myself to do that. I am reluctant to characterize any individual. I think I am one missionary Sister Van Staaden will not forget, but what she remembers is not as grown up (even if only slightly more) as I hope I am by now. A little after her disfellowshipment I was in Port Elizabeth and learned, I don't remember from whom, that only a year earlier she had been minding her grandchildren when one of her very young grandsons
had fallen in the swimming pool and drowned—the same swimming pool that I had seen locked up every Sunday when all the children were around. Sister Van Staaden had not been able to come to terms with the loss or her responsibility.

I don't wish to underestimate her anguish or the magnitude of its causes, but wish to point out that she wanted consolation from the Church. She must have felt responsible not only for the death but for the grief of the boy's parents, and this made her need to believe as revealed truth the doctrine that said what she had cost them would be restored. That was the consolation she wanted but could not get. There is nothing there that will help you out of this double grief, not even a missionary who will keep his mouth shut when it is important that he do so. But also there is no explicit doctrine to temper the guilt. The accepted doctrines are precise and exclusive, the power against heresy (we must beware even misquotation among us) too strong and insistent, that anyone should offer the comfort she needed even if it was only in the form of silence. In spite of confession and counsel, it is ultimately in private that these things are resolved if they are at all—in the silence. Privacy is the place of resolution and redemption. Here was a case of the Church making privacy also a place of despair.

I write this thinking of the Eastern Utah desert and hope the story can someday be lost there in a place more silent and empty than any other place I love. We drove into the desert west from Grand Junction. Here is a place to absorb everything including despair, to burn off the detritus of history to cut away the constricting bonds of
institutions. The contours of the land, the line of the horizon unimpaired by life or ambition, pull from you whatever you are willing to release. Maybe it is those who are willing to release most who love this landscape best—others fear its power to empty them. The heat is dry and comforting for those who can bear it, reminding us of our nakedness, that it is all we have even if it is not all we need. It is the primeval country, the razor sharp land.

I saw a man murdered early one Sunday morning in Capetown. We had ridden from Claremont to Mowbray for our weekly 8:00 a.m. meeting with the branch president. As we got off our "Net Blankes" car we saw a Coloured man running toward our end of the platform. His chest and face were bleeding. Another Coloured man was close behind him with a knife. This was after a Capetown Saturday night. By Sunday morning there are always several drunken Coloured deaths. We moved out of the way and this bleeding man jumped into the car we had just left through the closing doors. The train lurched forward a foot or two and then came to a stop. The doors opened and a white ticket-taker ejected the non-white fugitive, saying with smug annoyance, "Stay on your own fucking end of the fucking train." The man with the knife was waiting, and the bleeding man came running straight toward us again. We ducked into the station and came out the other side to find the bleeding man running in our direction once again from around the other side of the station. The pursuer had dropped the knife and picked up a big stick, more lethal weapon. We moved out of the way again and a little distance up the street. The man with the stick caught the other one at about the place where we had stood for a moment wondering
where to go to get away from this violence. Then, as a large crowd of Coloureds and natives gathered shouting, "Kill him! Kill him!" he beat him to death. This was early in the morning before full light.

Later at dusk we passed again on our way home to Claremont. There was a very large puddle of blood in the place. My text tells me that events and experiences are random. We order them artificially so that we can extract the meanings that support the illusions that consist of thousands and millions of those meanings and box us in a mausoleum. I think we all want to die. We are like this Coloured crowd, Sunday morning travelers, perhaps unconscious of the sources of our despair, our reality institutionalized, interpreted, imposed by politics or language and probably both, further tyrannized by ourselves in our attempts to escape the domination of these illusions. We break ourselves against the walls with whatever means we have, alcohol or misdirected prayer. If there are chinks, we need to find them and float through. I think we all want to die, just like the Coloured crowd wanted to die. They were afraid to die, but watching it happen to someone else, participating in the event, sharing the responsibility, brought a temporary but death-like release. I am not haunted by the pity of what I saw so much as by the catharsis. I belong in that crowd. We all do. We all want to die. We all want this boundless silence...
Postface

Justify your thesis.

You wouldn't care to ask something more specific . . . ?

What do you call the things you have written and included here, "Disney as Dreamer," etc.?

I call them essays.

Why are they essays? What are the qualities that make them essays?

You're asking me to justify a generic name when I tend to find the concept of genre irrelevant or at least insignificant, not only to the things I've written here but to any written text. I call them essays for lack of another word that would be understood in common discourse. I have to call them something so that discussion can begin. I'm expected to, and "written text" doesn't satisfy most people. But I find the reasons we usually assign generic names to
written texts to have no importance to any valid discussion of those texts. The reasons are often either biographical or editorial or typological—what the text looks like on the page or what the author or someone else decided to call a text on the basis of a resemblance between it and other texts of the same designation, all of which were so designated on the basis of resemblance between them and other texts of the same etc. If you trace the genealogy of genres, or try to define them according to the ways they supposedly separate themselves into groups within the whole body of literature, you find that the concept of genre, which presupposes division, is incoherent and indiscreet. For example, poetry is poetry, supposedly by definition, because of its heightened and economical language and because its "meaning" is produced by the tension or ambiguity of its parts and among its parts in its global reading. Yet if I can demonstrate the same quality in a story or in one of my own essays (and I can) does that make it a poem? Is it something else then that makes a poem? It seems unlikely. What is the use of genre if it is not discreet? Or is it a matter of degree? Is it a matter of how much of the traditional qualities of poetry—how concentrated and economical the language, how much tension and ambiguity—is contained in a written text? If this is the case, then a poem with more tension or ambiguity is more a poem than one with less. Wordsworth's sonnets are more poems than his longer poems and his longer poems are more poems than, say, "Song of Myself." For that matter the fifth chapter of "Urn Burial" is more a poem than "Song of Myself." It seems obvious that the only reasons written texts have generic names is for the purpose
of common discourse. Discussion is begun or renewed but never enhanced otherwise by classifying a text in a genre. "Skunk Hour" is called a "poem" but its excellences are present irrespective of its being called a poem or an essay or anything else. Genre, then, is neither prescriptive nor descriptive but wholly rhetorical. There is nothing wrong with this as long as the naming is helpful to discussion, but scholars and critics tend to give much more significance to names than they deserve.

Does that answer your question?

No. You have argued that there is a lack of enough difference between genres to make a coherent discussion of definitions or generic theories possible. But your notion of genre remains because you do obviously believe in the metageneric "literature," if I can take your mention of the supposed qualities of poetry as evidence. Wouldn't you say that those qualities at least differentiate literature from other forms of discourse, that literature presents a heightened coherence that differentiates it from other forms of discourse?

I may be tempted to at times but I don't think I would. The problems of discretion and degree would crop up again. Even if I did not want to repeat my argument (since it would seem that I have quite a lot going that depends on there being such a thing as literature), I'm afraid my argument would repeat itself. The only things to be done to protect if not justify my choice of pursuit is to ignore the problem and ignore the fact that "genre" is a null term, even as it
applies to the difference between what we will continue to think of as literature and nonliterature. Within the artificial class of literature I think it is much more interesting to ignore genre as a descriptive term than to insist on it.

Affirm something then. Something about us makes us read novels and essays and poems rather than technical manuals and government reports.

Many of us at least. But many of us do turn to forms of texts that would never be called literature in its restricted sense—many of us turn to "nonliterary" forms like journalism, soft science, religious writing, self-help, even literary criticism. We literary types are sure that our experience of written texts is more intense and pleasurable than that of nonliterary types, but of course we have no way of knowing for sure. Something in them does not respond to the writing we respond to, and yet I suspect we have more in common with respect to our response to language and texts than we think we do. I imagine we all share a basic sort of response to utterances (of which the literary text is one kind and the nonliterary another) that is differently oriented in different people. The orientation of this response prompts our selection of reading. A person may choose not to read at all but it is rare that a person chooses not to participate in any communication activity. As to readers, maybe their choice to read is an orientation of the basic language-response toward the intellectual involvement and release offered by any series of written
signs, governed in its configuration by social and other abstract forces. Then an intellectual orientation toward this or that abstract force—financial, for instance, or textual for literary readers—further determines choice of reading.

You are being very vague, especially on this "basic response" business. I think I understand what you mean by abstract forces and configurations—those are just big words that mean that you read what is addressed to your interests and tastes, that the subject matter and the audience it is addressed to determine how it is written. It's the old triangular paradigm from the reader's point of view. But what about "basic response." It's your turn to be specific.

I can't. It would get us too far off the subject and it would get me in over my head. I'll just say it is mathematical—I think numbers and variables somehow express the gratifications of language and texts better than language can. The system of correspondence between signifier and signified exist independently of any specific sign and it exists within every sign—probably not identically (since different parts of speech signify very differently from each other), but always mathematically. (Maybe I am using "mathematics" to mean something metalinguistic that is only partly mathematical (but I'm sure that algebra and arithmetic are involved (maybe because I don't know them very well (see what I mean about getting in over my head?))) Besides signification mathematics is also deeply involved in the system of "difference," but that is even more complex. If I
were to give a vague summary of this vague explanation, I would say that the gratifications talkers, listeners, writers, and readers derive from language and from texts can be found to correspond with mathematical situations in which there is resolution, or balance.

Probably most interesting is the involvement of mathematics in story, or plot. Here it is not so difficult to identify the qualities of mathematics, and often even the precise equations present in a text that account for the response of the reader as either one of gratification or frustration with the outcome of the story. It would be appropriate to call the gratification "classical" since it is the classical texts, or most texts written before the Romantic period, that seem to set the standard by which we arrive at gratification through plot (of course it is something in the nature of the reader and not the text that determines what will gratify the reader, but classical texts are convenient for the sake of description). Take two simple examples in which comparison of mathematical reductions is instructive: "The Knight's Tale" and A Midsummer Night's Dream. I'll assume you are familiar with both stories so that I don't have to go into any detail in describing their plots. The first is a tragedy and the second a comedy. The mathematical problem common to both and common to all texts it seems to me (even where the author refuses to deal with it or intentionally subverts the solution and leaves the problem unresolved or unsatisfactorily resolved) is how to turn a false equation into a true one. In both of these stories none of the characters is capable of solving the problem him or herself, and so in both resolution is achieved through divine (actually authorial)
intervention. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* the solution is in rearranging and equalizing the sets that are unequal at the beginning of the story. What starts out unsatisfactorily as \((1,1,1) = (1)\) or \(3 = 1\) becomes in the end \((1,1) = (1,1)\) or \(2 = 2\) (I should clarify that the figures represent the mortal lovers). To look for a valid mathematical process by which the solution is achieved would probably be futile, but the important thing is that by the end it *is* achieved. In "The Knight's Tale" there are not the mathematical resources to achieve the same sort of solution. There is no fourth figure, no Hermia. So \((1,1,1) = ?\) cannot be solved comically, that is, without a loss. Here resolution is achieved by subtraction: \((1+1+1-1) = (1+1)\).

That's a brief sketch. You're not laughing at it yet.

At least not until I hear how all this applies to your thesis. Tell me how all this applies to your essays.

You've got to be kidding! How should I know?

I though you might have had in mind some secret equation, some mathematical superstructure like Joyce's hermetic Homeric superstructure in *Ulysses*.

Well, of course I didn't. I can't use mathematics on it because I haven't figured out how the idea can be applied to texts which are not structured by plot. To tell the truth, I haven't given it much
thought. But I can point out a few features in my essays that help create a tension between resolution or balance and their opposites. I should say that where there is irresolution or unbalance in a text there is automatically a tension because the reader will desire a completed action, a solution, a tying together of all threads that have been introduced in the course of the text. Well, the writer is also a reader of his own text simultaneously with the writing of it, and he is likely to subvert the text toward balance or solution when his conscious purpose is to create unbalance. I'll try to show you how unbalance and balance occur in my essays.

If I may interrupt, it would be more than helpful if you would first explain why you consciously set out to do what you did in creating unbalance. You juxtapose passages of seemingly incompatible forms of discourse, you introduce ideas that you don't develop, or that you develop in some strange ways--sometimes it seems that a parent idea gives birth to several new ideas that leap out in random directions, some of them disappearing quickly like subatomic particles.

I don't know if that's as true as it may appear . . .

I want you to begin by explaining why you do these things before explaining how.

I think the main themes of the essays are carried through even more coherently than I intended, but I did try to subvert usual
expectations of a written text for many reasons, one being the wish to challenge the notion of genre. Another, because I believe that structure is always in some way mimetic of the author's mind, vision, mood, whatever you want to call it, and because this idea is especially appropriate in personal writing, I thought I would be telling the truth more truthfully if I were to present fragments, associations, lateral progressions of ideas and observations (as opposed to linear or traditionally rhetorical), in other words if I were to write the way I am, the way my memory and rational processes work rather than the way traditional format and structure require thought to be transformed when it is put in writing. As to why am I the way I present myself in my essays, well I don't think my mind works terribly differently from other people's—it performs differently on different subjects or in response to different stimuli. I can call "Disney as Dreamer" an artificial recreation of my notions of Disneyworld and Florida as they play around in my head.

What do you mean by the "lateral progressions of ideas and observations?"

I suppose it has something to do with the way the word "dreamer" applied to Walt Disney suggests a contrast with Martin Luther King simply because King used the word "dream" in his most famous utterance. And how that contrast reappears from time to time when the proper verbal signals trigger the mechanism that activates the free play of memory until it regrasps the contrast and puts it forward. I
know I'm talking rubbish, but you wanted an answer. Or it may have something to do with the way death seems always present in the text even when it isn't overtly a theme, as in the same section in the Disney essay.

All right. On to your subversions and subversions of your subversions.

I'll look first at "Disney as Dreamer" and its attempts at unbalance. It is a text full of disturbances. It begins with a thought that supposedly is some sort of inner monologue performed within the spatial context of Disneyworld.

Following the opening is a scene at Daytona Beach with a sort of revery on cowboys and fulfilled versus failed desires. This section in an essay that purports at least partly to be a report of a journey seems greatly misplaced—at least if there is to be any reflection in the essay's structure of the temporal and spatial progress of the journey. This is a common expectation of travel writing.

Then come the attempts. The epigraph, speciously attributed to Walt Disney, is repeated from the beginning of the essay and a lengthy joke follows. Not too many people have found it particularly funny so I have instructed the reader to violate his nature and not read it, but of course he will. The joke is a naive attempt to make sense of the nonsense epigraph. Later in the discursive section the quote is discovered to make devious sense given its context and purpose, but here in this attempt it is considered in isolation. The attempt is
rigorous but misguided and ultimately a shambles. The second attempt is more successful if not more enlightening. I have resisted suggestions that I place it before the other attempt because it seems to me to proceed from the exhaustion of the first attempt. The sense it finds in the epigraph is mysterious, but, one gathers, not nonsensical. What are the attempts doing in this essay? Is there a coherent relationship between them and the rest of the essay? Actually there is but their most obvious purpose and immediate effect is to disturb the text, even alienate the reader before he comes to the two following sections which are quite intimate. The discursive section on Disneyland functions somewhat similarly and is followed by a final intimate section.

I could go on but I've got to stop somewhere. Let me just point out that in the section following the attempts we finally come to the spatial and temporal beginning of the essay at Panama Beach, but even that beginning is arrived at obliquely by working backwards from the disenfranchised KOA.

Now to the balance. It may not be necessary by now to point out that the very attempts to disturb the text help create a thematic balance between alienation and intimacy, two experiences of travel that are described and illustrated in the essay several times in a variety of ways. There is also a balance between narration and discursion, or between observation and interpretation. It is not a perfect balance--the Disneyland section is very long--but most readers consider narration a "stronger" mode of writing, so it should not be necessary to have as much narration as discursion as long as
there is a fair amount and the essay ends with narration.

I may be taking undue advantage of my privileged position as writer when I explain that the disturbances of the text were mostly conscious, while most of the balances were not conscious and were only discovered after the writing.

I'll try to be more brief about the other two essays. In "Tour de Force" the text contains a major disturbance that it probably never recovers from: the second half is a narration of events that obviously didn't happen to the author. In fact, it is obvious that the author has no way of knowing that they are true so one is forced to conclude that they are "fiction." Here the reader is challenged since it is the nature of readers to try to discover solutions and resolutions to the problems in the text and, where those solutions and resolutions are not to be found, to invent them. The problem is this: Since part of the text is fiction and part is not, is it to be considered a story or an essay? Most readers would tend to conclude that it is a story since most readers, for reasons they have never examined, consider fiction to be stronger, or to dominate, essay. However, if they choose this solution they are faced with another, bigger problem: If it's a story, what is it doing between two essays dealing nonfictionally with similar themes and with other parts of the same event (the vacation)? And why does the title of the thesis call it an essay? If the reader then decides that it is an essay and not a story, how is the second half justified as an essay? It is not as big a problem, but it is unresolvable just the same.

The fiction part of the essay ends with a movement towards the
nonfiction where "I" unmask myself. While this may be seen as an attempt to restore balance, it doesn't do so completely. How do "I" know what Lana is thinking? If nonfiction were entirely restored, the story could be explained away as whimsy, a mere eccentricity. I can't deny that it is eccentric, but it is not merely eccentric.

The margin notes are an attempt to give the whole essay enough coherence--I could call it "intentional" or "imposed" coherence--so that its unsigned switch to fiction will be taken both seriously and lightly. I would say something more about the relationship of the notes to the text but I hate explaining my jokes and I think I've been doing that for several pages now.

Is all this boring you? It is me. I don't want to go on about "Pilgrimage"--do I have to? There's too much to say, and I don't think we would find it very interesting.

There's a lot there that needs defending.

You didn't like it?

Not all of it . . .

Then let me forestall your criticisms by saying I know that it spends a lot of time being obscure and that it states a point of view that is probably much more extreme than what you would have if you put together all my points of view on the subjects discussed, but how do you do that? Of all my thoughts and feelings on the subjects--meaning
and death—these are the most important because they are the most divergent from the mainstream of belief. I realize that the essay sounds very angry and neurotic. This was not intentional—at least not the neuroses—but that's all right. If I have to be neurotic, I'm lucky to be the first one to point it out.

The text or the writing of the text of "Pilgrimage" is an act of violence, and so it would not do to soften its language too much. I found the conclusion rather harrowing even as I wrote it. I think that by the time the end is reached, the author-voice has achieved an equilibrium that makes the end all the more forceful. When the reader is told that we all want to die, I hope he feels urged to retrace his steps through the essay to find out why. Although I do believe the conclusion in its context, I hope that mainly the reader is not so much persuaded as disturbed. I imagine a reader who has much in common with either those who determine the laws by which we know and perceive or those who complacently accept the laws and remain happily in their boxes. I imagine myself killing or at least wounding those ideas and attitudes. I say that we all want to die so we can find out or get out and I imagine that statement as being the final killing thrust. The corpse I leave looks something like Mortimer Adler, something like William F. Buckley, something like certain religious leaders. I'm joking. Don't start worrying about me. It's Adler's and Buckley's smug complacency with systems of absolutes that they somehow seem to have control over only because they think they know the systems better than the rest of us—it's that smug complacency that I want to damage. I know I can't. But I can try to kill an
image of myself as a weak-willed participant in a conspiracy against myself, as a wimp who will back down from his rebellion just because one of them says I ought to.

That's all. You may now change the subject.

Glad to. Is there anything you can say here that "Pilgrimage" doesn't already, to define yourself as a Mormon writer? Do you see yourself as a Mormon writer?

Certainly. But I think I know Mormon writers better than Mormon audiences. Having read a significant number of Mormon essays and of course even more of regular non-Mormon essay, I figured why write something I've already read there? It seems to me that by now, with a body of essays that can be called "Mormon," any reader of Mormon essays must be expecting mostly the same sorts of things--gently worded criticism, friendly persuasion, sermonizing, testimony bearing, the same kind of movement endlessly repeated between scripture, anecdote and generalization. I think what the writers have to say is usually far too important that it should end up in a dead format. I'm not saying that I've solved the problem or that my divergence has been successful.

Another problem in a majority of Mormon essays of the kind that are called "personal" is an absence of personality. This may be an indication of a form in its infancy, but I doubt it since Mormons have been writing in personal modes for a long time. On the other hand, the absence of personality may be a way of dealing with an audience
who, it is assumed, wants some evidence of orthodoxy before allowing aspects of doctrinal or Mormon social orthodoxy to be imitated in writing or critically evaluated. So author-persona is greatly subdued as a way of assuring the reader that the writer is as much a regular member of the congregation as anybody else. The Mormon personal essayist is so often standing up from the congregation and testifying, always so aware of the attention and (I think) restricting expectations of his Church audience that real personal honesty, where it differs too much with what the readers are willing to accept, is rare. Where personal honesty is concerned, who cares what the reader will accept? If you have to lie, why write?

Because, as you show elsewhere (mostly indirectly), all writing is a lie, and this must serve many purposes: violence, testimony, love, charity—as well as "honesty."

You're right. I overstated my case. I only meant that a person should be able to project some complete author-persona, instead of pretending that the person at the pulpit is all there is.

What about travel writing? Where do you fit in there?

I write in places about the quality of a place as it comes across to a first-time visitor. I have some ideas about the places. I describe hardships and moments of truth as they arise from places and events.
But I don't give histories and backgrounds. I don't describe things minutely, having little talent for that sort of thing.

Sometimes I tell little lies and decorate the truth.

Obviously, I don't know very much about travel writing, but if you do, feel free to fit me in based on that description or on a better one if you can come up with it. Are you almost at the end of your questions?

Almost.

Well hurry up. I'm getting writer's cramp or hoarse or something.

I don't know how to put this . . .

That's all right. Just say it.

It's something that's been bothering me since the beginning of this postface.

Come on--out with it.

Okay. It's about me--Who am I supposed to be? Am I you--is this a self-interview--or am I someone else? Or am I a composite of others?
You're a composite. But who isn't?

Why did you decide to write this postface in question-and-answer form?

Why not?
HOW I SPENT MY SUMMER VACATION:
THREE ESSAYS ON PLACE AND MEANING

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Department of English
M.A. Degree, April 1984

ABSTRACT

This thesis consists of three personal essays and a postface, in part experiments in genre, mode, and structure, and in large part explorations of the meanings of specific places in culture and on the self-definition of the observer-writer, the first essay being set in Florida and centered at Disneyworld; the second consisting of fragments of observations along the route from St. Augustine to Washington, D.C., and ending with a brief fiction; the third, a speculative/anti-speculative rumination over many things, including meaning, death, faith, and enshrinement, and set in Illinois, Missouri, and South Africa; and the postface a theoretical/descriptive defense of the thesis, all of which is abstracted in this abstract.

COMMITTEE APPROVAL:

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