

R o s m a r i e W a l d r o p

L a w n o f E x c l u d e d M i d d l e

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for Claude Royet-Journoud

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Part One
Lawn of Excluded Middle

I

When I say I believe that women have a soul and that its substance contains two carbon rings the picture in the foreground makes it difficult to find its appearance back where the corridors get lost in ritual sacrifice and hidden bleeding. But the four points of the compass are equal on the lawn of the excluded middle where full maturity of meaning takes time the way you eat a fish, morsel by morsel, off the bone. Something that can be held in the mouth, deeply, like darkness by someone blind or the empty space I place at the center of each poem to allow penetration.

I'm looking out the window at other windows. Though the pane masquerades as transparent I know it is impenetrable just as too great a show of frankness gives you a mere paper draft on revelations. As if words were passports, or arrows that point to the application we might make of them without considering the difference of biography and life. Still, depth of field allows the mind to drift beyond its negative pole to sun catching on a maple leaf already red in August, already thinner, more translucent, preparing to strip off all that separates it from its smooth skeleton. Beautiful, flamboyant phrase that trails off without predicate, intending disappearance by approaching it, a toss in the air.

I put a ruler in my handbag, having heard men talk about their sex. Now we have correct measurements and a stickiness between collar and neck. It is one thing to insert yourself into a mirror, but quite another to get your image out again and have your errors pass for objectivity. Vitreous. As in humor. A change in perspective is caused by the clarity by the ciliary muscle, but need not be conciliatory. Still, the eye is a camera, room for everything that is to enter, like the cylinder called the satisfaction of hollow space. Only language grows such grass-green grass.

Even if a woman sits at a loom, it does not mean she must weave a cosmogony or clothes to cover the emptiness underneath. It might just be a piece of cloth which, like any center of attention, absorbs the available light the way a waterfall can form a curtain of solid noise through which only time can pass. She has been taught to imagine other things, but does not explain, disdaining defense while her consciousness streams down the rapids. The light converges on what might be the hollow of desire or the incomplete self, or just lint in her pocket. Her hour will also come with the breaking of water.

Because I refuse to accept the opposition of night and day I must pit other, subtler periodicities against the emptiness of being an adult. Their traces inside my body attempt precariously, like any sign, to produce understanding, but though nothing may come of that, the grass is growing. Can words play my parts and also find their own way to the house next door as rays converge and solve their differences? Or do notes follow because drawn to a conclusion? If we don't signal our love, reason will eat our heart out before it can admit its form of mere intention, and we won't know what has departed.

All roads lead, but how does a sentence do it? Nothing seems hidden, but it goes by so fast when I should like to see it laid open to view whether the engine resembles combustion so that form becomes its own explanation. We've been taught to apply solar principles, but must find on our own where to look for Rome the way words rally to the blanks between them and thus augment the volume of their resonance.

It's a tall order that expects pain to crystallize into beauty. And we must close our eyes to conceive of heaven. The inside of the lid is fertile in images unprovoked by experience, or perhaps its pressure on the eyeball equals prayer in the same way that inference is a transition toward assertion, even observing rites of dawn against a dark and empty background. I have read that female prisoners to be hanged must wear rubber pants and a dress sewn shut around the knees because uterus and ovaries spill with the shock down the shaft.

The meaning of certainty is getting burned. Though truth will still escape us, we must put our hands on bodies. Staying safe is a different death, the instruments of defense eating inward without evening out the score. As the desire to explore my body's labyrinth did, leading straight to the center of nothing. From which projected my daily world of representation with bright fictional fireworks. Had I overinvested in spectacle? In mere fluctuations of light which, like a bird's wingbeat, must with time slow to the point of vanishing? What about buying bread or singing in the dark? Even if the ground for our assumptions is the ember of burnt childhood we're driven toward the sun as if logic had no other exit.

Though the way I see you depends on I don't know how many codes I have absorbed unawares, like germs or radiation, I am certain the conflicting possibilities of logic and chemistry have contaminated the space between us. Emptiness is imperative for feeling to take on substance, for its vibrations to grow tangible, a faintly trembling beam that supports the whole edifice. Caught between the thickness of desire and chill clarity, depth dissolved its contours with intemperate movements inside the body where much can be gathered. Can I not say a cry, a laugh are full of meaning, a denseness for which I have no words that would not channel its force into shallower waters, mere echo of oracles?

My anxiety makes you wary. As if I tried to draw you into a new kind of sexuality, a flutter of inner emptiness implying hunger to frame the momentary flight of birds with emotional reference and heat. Any initiation anticipates absolute abandon with the body misunderstood as solid, whereas images dissolve their objects. Even with the deep water ahead, even though the shores of syllogism may be flooded, we must not turn around. Behind us, incursions into our own field of vision, a mirror to lose our body out of the corner of an eye. It may look like a sentence we understand, yet quenches no thirst, no matter how hard we stroke it. But anxiety is a password which does not require a special tone of voice. Rather than to immersion in mysteries I was only leading you to common ground.

Whenever you're surprised that I should speak your language I am suddenly wearing too many necklaces and breasts, even though feeling does not produce what is felt, and the object of observation is something else again. Not modulating keys, not the splash that makes us take to another element, just my body alarmingly tangible, like furniture that exceeds its function, a shape I cannot get around. The way one suddenly knows the boulder in the road for a boulder, immovable, as if not always there, unmodified by inner hollows or the stray weeds and their dusty green, a solid obstacle with only trompe-l'oeil exits toward the subtler body of light accumulating in the distance.

I worried about the gap between expression and intent, afraid the world might see a fluorescent advertisement where I meant to show a face. Sincerity is no help once we admit to the lies we tell on nocturnal occasions, even in the solitude of our own heart, wishcraft slanting the naked figure from need to seduce to fear of possession. Far better to cultivate the gap itself with its high grass for privacy and reference gone astray. Never mind that it is not philosophy, but raw electrons jumping from orbit to orbit to ready the pit for the orchestra, scrap meanings amplifying the succession of green perspectives, moist features, spasms on the lips.

Words too can be wrung from us like a cry from that space which doesn't seem to be the body nor a metaphor curving into perspective. Rather the thickness silence gains when pressed. The ghosts of grammar veer toward shape while my hopes still lie embedded in a quiet myopia from which they don't want to arise. The mistake is to look for explanations where we should just watch the slow fuse burning. Nerve of confession. What we let go we let go.

Because we use the negative as if no explanation were needed the void we cater to is, like anorexia, a ferment of hallucinations. Here, the bird's body equals the rhythm of wingbeats which, frantic, disturb their own lack of origin, fear of falling, indigenous grey. Static electricity. Strobe map. Gap gardening. The sun feeds on its dark core for a set of glistening blood, in a space we can't fathom except as pollution colors it.

The word “not” seems like a poor expedient to designate all that escapes my understanding like the extra space between us when I press my body against yours, perhaps the distance of desire, which we carry like a skyline and which never allows us to be where we are, as if past and future had their place whereas the present dips and disappears under your feet, so suddenly your stomach is squeezed up into your throat as the plane crashes. This is why some try to stretch their shadow across the gap as future fame while the rest of us take up residence in the falling away of land, even though our nature is closer to water.

The affirmation of the double negative tempts us to invent a myth of meaning where the light loops its wavelength through dark hollows into unheard-of Americas, or a double-tongued flute speeds decimals over the whole acoustic range of the landscape till it exhausts itself with the excess of effect brought home. Can I walk in your sleep, in order to defer obedience and assent to my own waking? Or will the weight of error pull me down below the symmetries of the round world? Touching bottom means the water's over your head. And you can't annul a shake of that by shaking it again.

In Providence, you can encounter extinct species, an equestrian statue, say, left hoof raised in progress toward the memory of tourists. Caught in its career of immobility, but with surface intact, waiting to prove that it can resist the attack of eyes even though dampened by real weather, even though historical atmosphere is mixed with exhaust like etymology with the use of a word or bone with sentence structure. No wonder we find it difficult to know our way about and tend to stay indoors.

A window can draw you into the distance within proximity all the way to where it vanishes with the point. This is not a hocuspocus which can be performed only by kinship terms. The glass seems to secure perspectives that can shoulder the cold stare of so many third persons while our image is resolved in favor of inaccessible riverbeds. Alternating small and large measures, the dust on the pane is part of the attraction, a way of allowing the environment in. So would a stone's throw, substituting the high frequencies of shattering for the play of reflections.

We know that swallows are drawn to window panes, etching swift lurching streaks across and sometimes crashing. I picked up the body as if easing the vast sky through a narrow pulse toppling over itself. Caught between simulacrum and paradox, the hard air. Even if a body could survive entering its own image, the mirror is left empty, no fault in the glass breaking the evenness of light.

What's left over if I subtract the fact that my leg goes up from the fact that I raise it? A link to free will or never trying, as only our body knows to disobey an even trade to the sound of a fiddle. Something tells me not to ask this question and accept the movement. The speed of desire like a hot wind sweeping the grass or flash of water under the bridge. For doing itself seems not to have any volume: an extensionless point, the point of a needle out to draw blood regardless.

This is not thinking, you said, more what colors it, like a smell entering our breath even to the seat of faith under the left nipple. Like the children I could have borne shaping my body toward submission and subterfuge. It is possible, I admitted, to do physics in inches as well as in centimeters, but a concept is more than a convenience. It takes us through earnest doorways to always the same kind of example. No chance of denser vegetation, of the cool shadow of firs extending this line of reasoning into the dark.

My love was deep and therefore lasted only the space of one second, unable to expand in more than one dimension at a time. The same way deeper meaning may constrict a sentence right out of the language into an uneasiness with lakes and ponds. In language nothing is hidden or our own, its light indifferent to holes in the present or postulates beginning with ourselves. Still, you may travel alone and yet be accompanied by my good wishes.

Look in thy heart and write, you quoted. As if we could derive the object from desire, or proper breathing from the structure of transitivity. It's true, the brain is desperate for an available emptiness to house its clutter, as a tone can only grow from a space of silence, lifted by inaudible echoes as birds are by the air inside their bones. So we reach down, although it cannot save us, to the hollows inside the body, to extend them into so many journeys into the world, so many words shelling the echo of absence onto the dry land.

In the way well-being contains the possibility of pain a young boy may show the meekness we associate with girls, or an excess of sperm, on occasion, come close to spirituality. But a name is an itch to let the picture take root inside its contour though sentences keep shifting like sand, and a red patch may be there or not. All heights are fearful. We must cast arbitrary nets over the unknown, knot the earth's rim to the sky with a rope of orisons. For safety. For once human always an acrobat.

Meaning is like going up to someone I would be with, though often the distance doesn't seem to lessen no matter how straight my course. Busy moving ahead, I can't also observe myself moving, let alone assess the speed of full steam minus fiction and sidetracked in metric crevices. It's hard to identify with the image of an arrow even if it points only to the application we make of it. But then, meandering does not guarantee thought either though it simulates its course toward wider angles, which make us later than we are, our fingers the space of already rust from the key. Even the weight of things can no longer measure our calculations. Conquered by our own scope we offer no resistance to the blue transparency, the startling downpour of sun.

I wanted to settle down on a surface, a map perhaps, where my near-sightedness might help me see the facts. But grammar is deep. Even though it only describes, it submerges the mind in a maelstrom without discernable bottom, the dimensions of possibles swirling over the fixed edge of nothingness. Like looking into blue eyes all the way through to the blue sky without even a cloudbank or flock of birds to cling to. What are we searching behind the words as if a body of information could not also bruise? It is the skeleton that holds on longest to its native land.

For a red curve to be a smile it needs a face around it, company of its kind to capture our attention by the between, the bait of difference and constant of desire. Then color sweeping over cheeks is both expansion of internal transport and an airing of emotion. Understanding, too, enters more easily through a gap between than where a line is closed upon itself. This is why comparisons, for all their limping, go farther even than the distance of beauty, rose or fingered dawn, or of remembering contracts signed in blood.

Electric seasons. Night has become as improbable as a sea forever at high tide. The sheer excess of light makes for a lack of depth, denying our fall from grace, the way a membrane is all surface. Or the way we, clamoring for sense, exclude so many unions of words from the sphere of language. As if one could fall off the edge of the earth. Why do we fear the dark as unavoidable defeat when it alone is constant, and we'd starve if it stopped watering the lawn of dreams.

You were determined to get rid of your soul by expressing it completely, rubbing the silver off the mirror in hope of a new innocence of body on the other side of knowing. A limpid zone which would not wholly depend on our grammar in the way the sea draws its color from the sky. Noon light, harsh, without shadow. Each gesture intending only its involvement with gravity, a pure figure of reach, as the hyperbola is for its asymptotes or circles widening on the water for the stone that broke the surface. But the emigration is rallied, reflections regather across the ripples. Everything in our universe curves back to the apple.

The capacity to move my hand from left to right arises on a margin of indecision and doubt winding into vertiginous inner stairwells, but only when adjacent shadows have cooled the long summer sun toward a more introverted, solitary quality of light for the benefit of eyes tensing to see the dark before concepts. This is an attempt to make up for inner emptiness in the way that Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers dance with more desperate brio to add a third dimension to their characters. Nevertheless the capacity does not explain how the meaning of individual words can make a tent over a whole argument. It is not a feeling, but a circular movement to represent the transfer of visibility toward dream without abrogating the claims of body.

As if I had to navigate both forward and backward, part of me turned away from where I'm going, taking the distance of long corridors to allow for delay and trouble, for keeping in the dark while being led on. In this way Chinese characters seem to offer their secret without revealing it, invitation to enter a labyrinth which, like that of the heart, may not have a center. It is replaced by being lost which I don't like to dwell on because the search for motivation can only drive us downward toward potential that is frightening in proportion to its depth and sluiceways to disappearance. It is much better, I have been advised, just to drift with the stream. The ink washes into a deeper language, and in the end the water runs clear.

Part Two
The Perplexing Habit of Falling

The Attraction of the Ground

In the beginning there were torrential rains, and the world dissolved in puddles, even though we were well into the nuclear age and speedier methods. Constant precipitation drenched the dry point of the present till it leaked a wash of color all the way up to the roots of our hair. I wanted to see mysteries at the bottom of the puddles, but they turned out to be reflections that made our heads swim. The way a statue's eyes bring our stock of blindness to the surface. Every thought swelled to the softness of flesh after a long bath, the lack of definition essential for happiness, just as not knowing yourself guarantees a life of long lukewarm days stretching beyond the shadow of pure reason on the sidewalk. All this was common practice. Downpour of sun. Flood of young leafiness. A slight unease caused by sheer fill of body. Running over and over like the light spilled westward across the continent, a river we couldn't cross without our moment, barely born, drowning in its own translucent metaphor.

The silence, which matted my hair like a room with the windows shut too long, filled with your breath. As if you didn't need the weight of words in your lungs to keep your body from dispersing like so many molecules over an empty field. Being a woman and without history, I wanted to explore how the grain of the world runs, hoping for backward and forward, the way sentences breathe even this side of explanation. But you claimed that words absorb all perspective and blot out the view just as certain parts of the body obscure others on the curve of desire. Or again, as the message gets lost in the long run, while we still see the messenger panting, unflagging, through the centuries. I had thought it went the other way round and was surprised as he came out of my mouth in his toga, without even a raincoat. I had to lean far out the window to follow his now unencumbered course, speeding your theory towards a horizon flat and true as a spirit level.

My legs were so interlaced with yours I began to think I could never use them on my own again. Not even if I shaved them. As if emotion had always to be a handicap. But maybe the knots were a picture of my faint unrest at having everything and not more, like wind caught in the trees with no open space to get lost, a tension toward song hanging in the air like an unfinished birdcry, or the smell of the word verbena, or apples that would not succumb to the attraction of the ground. In a neutral grammar love may be a refrain screamed through the loudspeakers, a calibration of parallels or bone structure strong enough to support verisimilitude. A FOR SALE sign in red urged us to participate in our society, while a whole flock of gulls stood in the mud by the river, ready to extend the sky with their wings. Another picture. Is it called love or nerves, you said, when everything is on the verge of happening? But I was unable to distinguish between waves and corpuscles because I had rings under my eyes, and appearances are fragile. Though we already live partly underground it must be possible to find a light that is exacting and yet allows us to be ourselves even while taking our measure.

Although you are thin you always seemed to be in front of my eyes, putting back in the body the roads my thoughts might have taken. As if forward and backward meant no more than right and left, and the earth could just as easily reverse its spin. So that we made love to each other the present of a stage where time would not pass, and only space would age, encompassing all 2000000 dramatic situations, but over the rest of the proceedings, the increase of entropy and unemployment. Meanwhile we juggled details of our feelings into an exaggeration which took the place of explanation, and consequences remained in the kind of repose that, like a dancer's, already holds the leap toward inside turning out.

Your arms were embracing like a climate that does not require being native. They held me responsive, but I still wondered about the other lives I might have lived, the unused cast of characters stored within me, outcasts of actuality no stranger than my previous selves. As if a word should be counted a lie for all it misses. I could imagine my body arching up toward other men in a high-strung vertigo that scored a virtual accompaniment to our real dance, deep phantom chords echoing from nowhere though with the force of long acceleration, of flying home from a lost wedding. Stakes and mistakes. Big with sky, with bracing cold, with the drone of aircraft, the measures of distance hang in the air before falling in thick drops. The child will be pale and thin. Though it had infiltrated my bones, the thought was without marrow. More a feeling that might accompany a thought, a ply of consonants, an outward motion of the eye.

I began to long for respite from attention, the freedom of interruption. The clouds of feeling inside my head, though full of soft light, needed a breeze or the pull of gravity. More rain. As if I suddenly couldn't speak without first licking my lips, spelling my name, enumerating the days of the week. Would separation act as an astringent? Ink our characters more sharply? I tried to push the idea aside, afraid of losing the dimensions of nakedness, but it kept turning up underfoot, tripping me. Clearly, the journey would mean growing older, flat tiredness, desire out of tune. Much practice is needed for two-dimensional representation whether in drawing or rooms, and it emaciates our undertakings in the way that lack of sleep narrows thinking to a point without echoes, the neck of the hour glass. You may be able to travel fast forward without looking back, but I paint my lashes to slow the child in my face and climb the winding stairs back to a logic whose gaps are filled by mermaids.

Many questions were left in the clearing we built our shared life in. Later sheer size left no room for imagining myself standing outside it, on the edge of an empty day. I knew I didn't want to part from this whole which could be said to carry its foundation as much as resting on it, just as a family tree grows downward, its branches confounding gravitation and gravity. I wanted to continue lying alongside you, two parallel, comparable lengths of feeling, and let the stresses of the structure push our sleep to momentum and fullness. Still, a fallow evening stretching into unknown elsewheres, seductive with possibility, doors open onto a chaos of culs-de-sac, of could-be, of galloping off on the horse in the picture. And whereto? A crowning mirage or a question like What is love? And where? Does it enter with a squeeze, or without, bringing, like interpretation, its own space from some other dimension? Or is it like a dream corridor forever extending its concept toward extreme emptiness, like that of atoms?

Mass, Momentum, Stress

Is it because we cannot capture our own selves or because logically nothing is on its own that we turn to each other for reflection and echo as philosophers always go back to the same props and propositions? If you return from far enough away you perhaps never left, but it still takes coats off, or character, to warp the arrow. A circle is a figure almost as clear as a straight line, but covers more territory, even water, the way the relation of two people is not bound to follow rules on separable prefixes. We knew the state of our affairs and pooled them. Once your reflection surfaced out of deep water, the fragile mirror prohibiting the turbulence of touch, I wondered if I would not trade this transparency for a white space of its own without allusions, provided the ice was solid enough to walk across. Even though it was summer, we moved rather like snow blown by the wind, not easy to make tracks on, melting and refreezing in harsh ridges.

What once had been vehemence now seemed to inhibit us. We could never again come to its watermark, with all the ambivalence in the air. You seemed instead like too thin skin, shrinking suspiciously from close-ups, unaware that I was also on my guard, ready to retreat as soon as the mind gets soft with the warmth and begins to shed its clothes. Once you blur the distinction between equal and equivocal, space is interrupted and disappears in subcutaneous shivers. But it would be a pity if nothing more happened between us because we have memorized ourselves too thoroughly and are wary even as we travel through the passes and impasses of sleep, through layers of velvet density, back to the innermost desire anchored in all our questions and actions, anchored so deeply that we cannot touch it.

To test if I could see your child as my own without preparatory pregnancy or periods of nausea to allow for resistance, I began to take walks in the dark. "Seeing as" is not part of perception. And for that reason like seeing and again not like. In the hot summer night, perspective might be conceived to travel both forward and backward to the same point of vanishing time, a conception after the fact, a gestation backward into the stability of impossible desires that might draw him as the sea does if you look too long at its spectacle. And he comes padding at night on bare feet and takes a long look at my body before whimpering to you of fear of the dark, so that you'll draw the sheet up and protect him against the shock of female nakedness.

Dynasties of space seem to claim him, this child who embraces his vertigo through atoms as porous as the solar system make images vanish into intervals, and intervals into sheer emptiness. His leaps delirious, body flung from mountain tops in pursuit of a remote self, so hard to trap in the subtlest net of language, games, or set of mirrors. Though the temperature may fall there's no doubt in his green blood that he can always squeeze a cushion from the air, a wealth of longest tracks settling him gently down in his picture of the world. No measurements disturb the chances of fun and blame or spring's exorbitant unfolding in his veins. Anxiety comes later with a disproportion of raincoats and knowing the groundlessness of our beliefs. I've lost my skin to immense, complex summers and the meaning of words to the uncertainty of fact. Not just the rivers, the riverbeds too are shifting.

The injury was in not responding until the shiniest sheet of tension lay glistening between us and the balance of power started to slip on the ice. At the speed of slight the clocks run counter. I tried to recall the moment when I realized that wind losing momentum may not mean holes in the argument or ice so that the fish can breathe. We needn't quarrel if, instead of surveying our relation from within, we allowed that we had each drawn the line with flying colors, so that you saw red zigzag lightning where I lay down on a green lawn. Moving at different speeds we contracted different diseases and took the most negative measure of each other's hunger. This was why the ratio of emotional to body heat remained impaired even though we wore boots and heavy coats. It would take wrapping up in words.

You were busy planting your picture of the world into your child's mind. Mine, in comparison, seemed more like the hotel slated for demolition, beyond redecorating. From the window, not the expected distance of beauty, but a row of scraggy young trees facing a church covered from top to bottom with scaffolding which allowed only rare glimpses of white volutes and projections. One of the trees seemed scaggier than the rest, perhaps blighted, but on the whole it was 2 lines of wood at different stages, and I was learning to read between them as slowly as possible. A hitch in time. The way a look into a mirror saves miles. If the scaffolding cast its shadow over your boy, who was running circles around its posts, he remained unaware, his skin hardly darkened. He expects definitions on the order of freeways and runaway nebula, not horizons contracting to flywheel and cog, hard fiber in the pit of the stomach.

I worked hard at keeping perspective in the family and periodically faced in your direction as the faithful toward the East. Your space was framed so differently from mine that it located your “here” around the curve of the horizon, unreachable by even my longest sentence. All I could see was a glare as over the Great Fire of London. So that landscape became a religion of surface, teaching divine imperfection and replacing baptism by fire. You thought it was improbable that the concept of original sin was upset by electricity in motion any more than by gravity’s competing for the apple. The question of intimacy did not come up to the temperature, but had to be raised so we could get out of the building already full of smoke. It may be easier to speed the process of oxidation than to hold on to the illusions of communication. Nor can the sign for water quench the flames in my lungs. It only inhales loads of silence which connect and separate us according to the twists and turns of the plot.

Later, my shadow stopped following and, after a moment of holding its breath, steadily lengthened my progress ahead of me, obscuring other roads as if only a narrow consistency could inherit a goal. It was also at this time that the mirror began to show the back of my head, and my stare would speed its moving on while I stood still as a cat within her fur. Even so, we know the way to go is outward and stretch pale roots toward the world, of which we really know nothing. The same way we walk on credit, swinging the body forward, confident that, though for one moment in each step we tread the void, it won't close over our head. You, the more courageous, had even put forth a child with ruthless appetites and so bridged wider intervals toward those edges of experience where impressions seem sharp as line drawings just before they drop into the virtual and vicarious, mysteries beyond the vested interests of before and because.

Even at your nakedest, your nakedness would not reach all the way to your face, the way a rock by the sea is always veiled in water and foam as in a memory of deep space. Or perhaps I was looking for something beyond my capacity of seeing, and the shifts of hiddenness were only in the image I carried somewhere between head and dark of stomach as I searched the woods for poisonous mushrooms. The technique is to knock them out with a stick and tread them to pulp which saves lives and provides entertainment. Actually I prefer stories with sharp edges cut by blades manufactured with great precision in Solingen, Germany. These I use like a religion to keep me on the straight and narrative which, like computers and gods, admits only yes or no. No straying into ambiguous underbrush where hidden desire is not made any clearer by intermittent fulfillment, the light and shadow playing over my rush of wildwater actions while I feel I'm sitting motionless on the bank.

With the body running down inexorably, how can we each day reweave our net of closeness and distance? But though time burns at both ends, it rolls around the clock, and evening replays events of the day in a new light, showing perhaps electric waves instead of raindrops, glittering on a spiderweb. The relation is not resemblance, but pulling the trigger on a nerve. While time takes the shortest cut right into consciousness, physical cause stops at the door. There remains an ultimate gap, as between two people, that not even a penis can bridge, a point at which we lose sight of the erection crossing a horizon in the mind. This is accompanied by slight giddiness as when we jump over our shadow or admire the waves rolling incomprehensible resolutions in a border of darker and darker gray. It dispenses us from trying to draw profit from attention to ritual, like watching the spider ride its memory from periphery to center orb at nightfall.

You went through the school of velocity hoping for speed worthy of flight where you would feel stillness in your bones while falling into deep thought. Not a space I could thrust my breasts into while maintaining the mountain climber's three points of contact with the surface, using the fourth to goad time toward climax. The height of a mountain does not depend on how we climb it or equally of chance. Steep territory. Face to rock-face. Different scales of gravity code a slow body against dreams of flying, both menaced by the thin complexities of the air. The problem was less securing a foothold than an echo off the cliff. What I am doing here is hanging a name on a difficulty, a common alternative to the sheer effort toward telling ground. The turtle is geologically the oldest of our extant amphibia. Even though we live on a decently slow-moving planet, I sometimes think the world might be edging away and out of reach.

Accelerating Frame

I badly wanted a story of my own. As if there were proof in spelling. But what if my experience were the kind of snow that does not accumulate? A piling of instants that did not amount to a dimension? What if wandering within my own limits I came back naked, with features too faint for the mirror, unequal to the demands of the night? In the long run I could not deceive appearances: Days and nights were added without adding up. Nothing to recount in bed before falling asleep. Even memory was not usable, a landscape hillocky with gravitation but without monuments, it did not hold the eye, did not hinder its glide toward the horizon where the prose of the world gives way to the smooth functioning of fear. If the wheel so barely touches the ground the speed must be enormous.

The concept of an inner picture is misleading. Like those on the screen, it takes the outer picture as a model, yet their uses are not more alike than statistics and bodies. Figures, we know, can proceed without any regard for reality, no matter how thin the fabric. True, the missing pieces can be glued in, but if you look for the deep you won't frighten your vertigo away. An ambition to fathom need not hold water. Stay on shore, put on more sweaters, and let the roar of the breakers swallow your urge to scream. If not the clouds themselves, their reflections withdraw with the tide. Then there is the familiar smell of wet sand and seaweed, debris of every kind, including hypodermics, condoms, oozing filth. My outer self comes running on pale legs to claim my share, while my inner picture stands dazed, blinking behind sunglasses, demanding a past that might redeem the present.

I knew that true or false is irrelevant in the pursuit of knowledge which must find its own ways to avoid falling as it moves toward horizons of light. We can't hope to prove gravity from the fact that it tallies with the fall of an apple when the nature of tallying is what Eve's bite called into question. My progress was slowed down by your hand brushing against my breast, just as travel along the optic nerve brakes the rush of light. But then light does not take place, not even in bed. It is like the kind of language that vanishes into communication, as you might into my desire for you. It takes attention focused on the fullness of shadow to give light a body that weighs on the horizon, though without denting its indifference.

I thought I could get to the bottom of things by taking my distance from logic, but only as far as the immediate. Here the moment flaunted its perfect roundness and could not be left behind because it accelerated with me, intense like roses blooming in the dark whereas I was still figuring out: are red roses at night darker than white ones, and all cats gray? But at some point we have to pass from explanation to description in the heroic hope that it will reach right out into experience, the groundswell flooding my whole being like heat or pollution, though the haze outside always looks as if it could easily be blown away. A cat of any color can descend into the pit behind her eyes and yawn herself right back to the bland surfaces that represent the world in the logical form we call reality. But logic is no help when you have no premises. And more and more people lacking the most modest form of them are wandering through the streets. Do we call the past perfect because it is out of sight? The present person singular is open to terrifying possibilities that strip off skin till I weep as when peeling onions.

The moments of intensity did not dazzle long. Even though they took my breath into a hollow empty of time, realm back behind thought, way back behind the ceiling I stared at as a child, it was a precarious shelter breeding its own rush back to the present that moves on whether all seats are taken or not. Only in time is there space for us, and crowded at that between antecedent and consequence, and narrow, narrow. I suddenly cried. The now cast its shadow over love. Sooner or later we look out of maternal mornings at the hard sun to check income and expenditure and find the operations covert, the deficit national. There are porters on the platform, pigeons preening in the breeze showing their glassy-eyed profile. Is this a description of what I saw, a quote, a proposition relevant as a lure for feeling, or a tangle of labels and wishes, with a blind spot reserved for the old woman with shopping bags due to walk through in a few minutes? I have no answer because seeing does not so much give precise reference as imply motive, which is of no use, not even deductible when I assess the day gone by. But then it is already gone by.

Even a tree with roots square in the past cannot keep the moment from exploding in frenzy, quick bits of already gone. But there have been instants without electrical outlets, of breathing through the mouth, when I felt time pulled into a solid tightrope on which emotions swayed like acrobats and could form a foetus in the way a word casts a shadow. Then I notices stream rising from the teapot in the picture and searched your face for another face. And found it. Open to the four winds and most stunning horoscopes. It is thanks to the flight of swallows that winter passes for the extravagance of maple leaves. An intricate reckoning of large and small cycles of light breathes deeper green in proportion to the obstruction of perspective, just as conviction may be swallowed into action, and silence be engrossed with things that baffle.

Then I realized that the world was the part of my body I could change by thinking and projected the ratio of association to sensory cortex onto the surface of the globe, inside out as you might turn a glove. Now my brain was outer space, the way we imagine it, finite but unbounded, augmenting resonance and admitting circumnavigation as idea. Now I had plantains and houses, cities, continents, planets, exclamations and concepts orbiting together, but no navel. Fear of falling gave way to a craving for salt, and oceanic feelings to persistence of frame, anticipating pictures out of great distance as when remembering a dream, or the way the white wings of a gull leave no trace, but give their rhythm to the sky. At this point you struck a match on my attention whose swerve was deflected by the heft of massive bodies. But maybe I was striking it and thinking of you as a quick leap of light, or a substance like phosphorus, the closeness of focus and hand in love consuming the last distinctions.

It takes wrestling with my whole body for words on the tip of my tongue to be found later, disembodied, on paper. A paradox easily dissolved as any use of language is a passport to the fourth dimension, which allows us to predict our future, matter of body, even rock, thinning to a reflection that I hope outlasts both the supporting mirror and the slide from sign to scissors. Meanwhile, the crossing is difficult, maybe illegal, the documents doubtful, the road through darkness, wet leaves, rotting garbage, people huddled in doorways, The vehicle breaks down, the tenor into song. Again and again, the hand on paper as if tearing the tongue from its root, translating what takes place to what takes time. This, like any fission, may cause a burst of light. A body is consumed more quickly if the temperature accelerates into love. Art takes longer, as the proverb says, but likewise shortens life. We may also get stranded, caught on the barbed wire, muscles torn and useless for the speedway.

Finally I came to prefer the risk of falling to the arrogance of solid ground and placed myself on the thin line of translation, balancing precariously between body harnessed to slowness and categories of electric charge whizzing across fields nobody could stand on. Working the charge against my retina into the cognate red of a geranium I wondered if the direction of translation should be into arithmetic or back into my native silence. Or was this a question like right or left, reversible? And could it be resolved on the nonstandard model of androgyny, sharing out the sensitive zones among the contenders? Meanwhile everyday language is using all its vigor to keep the apple in the habit of falling through the curve of the world no longer fits out flat feet and matter's become too porous to place them on.

On Lawn of Excluded Middle

1.

The law of excluded middle is a venerable old law of logic. But much can be said against its claim that everything must be either true or false.

2.

The idea that women cannot think logically is a not so venerable old stereotype. As an example of thinking, I don't think we need to discuss it.

3.

Lawn of Excluded Middle plays with the idea of woman as the excluded middle. Women and, more particularly, the womb, the empty center of the woman's body, the locus of fertility.

4.

This is not a syllogism.

5.

This is a syllogism.

6.

Poetry: an alternate, less linear logic.

7.

Wittgenstein makes language with its ambiguities the ground of philosophy. His games are played on the Lawn of Excluded Middle.

8.

The picture of the world drawn by classical physics conflicts with the picture drawn by quantum theory. As A.S. Eddington says, we use classical physics on Monday, Wednesday, Friday, and quantum theory on Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday.

9.

For Newton, the apple has the perplexing habit of falling. In another frame of reference, Newton is buffeted up toward the apple at rest.

10.

The gravity of love encompasses ambivalence.