

# Novatian Poetry

*compiled by*

*John Hofman*

~~~~~  
This is a work of fiction only.  
~~~~~

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printed via [www.LULU.com](http://www.LULU.com)  
United States of America

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## 2007 Preface

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I am a member of several online creative writing workshops or social networks. In the early part of 2006 appeared an astounding series of “poems” on one of these networks (which shall remain nameless). Because the network itself is assumed to be known to the reader, I will share a little about it. It was created and is run by this fellow named Guy. Each piece of writing posted on the site is required to have a tag attached to it like: academic, novel, play, poem, script, etc.

At any rate, I was moved by these poems because of their very freeing writing style. And so thus began my quest to find the author, Novatia, to thank her. I was a legal secretary in my time and had had the occasion to use my skills in locating people several times in the past. Unfortunately, Novatia was taken aback at being discovered, wrote one last poem (*isn't*) and never wrote again. I have tried many times to assure her that I would never reveal her full name or where she lives. I hold dear the secrets of a friend. But she would have none of my reassurances. And so I apologize to the reader for scaring into hiding such a bright young talent. It is because I continue to feel bad for this error in judgment that I (as part of my penance) publish (with her acquiescence) this, the entirety of work which she produced on the site.

With regard to the last poem in this collection: It appeared after six months or so of silence from Novatia and was generated under a different user name. Novatia has never admitted (nor denied) to me that it was of her hand. I include it nevertheless as An Honorable Mention.

In spite of our rough beginning, Nova, you have become a very dear friend. Thank you.

— *John Hofman*

## Nova's Online Profile

---

expressions from one who seeks to be unheard

## the missing muse

---

the muse comes  
the muse goes  
when the muse stays  
count yourself lucky

the muse only shows himself  
or herself  
at his own pleasure  
and only shows even the best of us humans  
the slightest glimpse of his powers

is the muse here  
did he grace us with his presence  
perhaps this is just the spawn of his shadow

surely greater things than this have been written  
and i doubt you need read all  
the muse has inspired  
in order to learn about the muse

old tired knurled fingers  
at the end of damaged hands  
yet these too can be instruments to the muse

this shows only we have much to learn  
from the wealth of the oft missing muse

## from a self-induced cloud

---

from a self-induced cloud  
of drink and drugs  
late at night I write what is now just another memory  
just another question

was it a massage or a rape

I remember his hands and fingers running through my hair.  
I remember his hands on my body . . .  
I remember his standing close . . .  
I remember him pushing . . .

I remember me crying.  
I remember me not sure of what to do.  
I remember me feeling pain.  
Oddly, I remember looking at the clock.

I didn't say no or stop or yes or go  
I didn't say please or help  
I didn't say anything or nothing  
but was crying enough - especially when it was I who tried to hide my tears

He moved me how he wanted.  
I didn't kick. I didn't hit. I tried to relax.  
But inside myself I was fighting myself - but he couldn't see that.

If he could have seen the unseen, he would have backed away.  
BECAUSE I WAS FIGHTING HARD AND YELLING LOUD  
but neurons shouting at other neurons are below whisper level

Whatever it was, I got hurt. If I did nothing overt to stop it, then  
my hurt is self-inflicted. This part of my recovery is certainly  
self-inflicted. I hope that bottle wasn't completely empty.

# trash talk

---

P  
e  
r  
h  
a  
p  
s

letters

e o  
h f  
t t  
f h

the strokes o e words themselves

u r v e  
the c s, the verticals, the horizontals, t  
h  
e

d  
i  
a  
g  
o  
n  
a  
l  
s

are  
in and of themselves

art  
ipso facto

so it is not what is said  
but that it is said  
witches import aunt

.s.o. \_m\_a\_y.b.e.

\*RUBBISH\*  
/is/  
beautiful

## trash talk comment

---

I must confess that I rather like this poem as one of my favourites, but I do want to make a note that has been bothering me regarding: "horizontals". I wanted it to be displayed horizontally, but I wasn't sure how to do it in ASCII or simple text. So, for example, the "i" should appear as ".\_" and the "l" should appear as "\_\_" and the "z" appears as "N" (I think I got that right) - do you know what I mean? So if you look at it from a 90 degree tilt, it appears legible, like a smiley :-). Adding this note makes me feel better. Thanks.

--Novatia, 11 Mr 06

## burning books

---

But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil full of deadly poison.  
-- James 3:8 (KJV)

So I was taught. A harsh lesson.  
And I wanted so much to be a good girl.  
To be loved.

I didn't want to hurt anybody.  
The tongue is a flame. Always ready to seek and destroy its next victim.  
So I stayed quiet.

But I had another flame inside me.  
The flame of creativity that longed to speak.  
An ungodly flame.  
An ungirly flame.

I remain terrified.  
Terrified of the flames of hell.  
Terrified of the flames of my own tongue. Terrified even to say, hello.

But my creative flame bubbles over.  
Maybe no one will notice.  
Maybe no one will hear me.  
Maybe it will be okay. I'm so afraid.

I so much don't want to hurt anyone.

## transgender

---

Do you think I should be a boy?

Perhaps I worry too much. But in some of my work, a gender is hinted at. I try to be anonymous, given the (possibly over-hyped) fears of Internet security. Stalking. Identity theft. Worse.

Maybe I should switch personal pronouns in every other poem. Sounds inconvenient.

And I never liked the "and/or" constructions, the attempted mashes, . . .

Should I include a disclaimer that what I write might not be true? But does that not insult the audience who already knows that the written word is full of fiction?

Should I include a disclaimer that I don't want to be heard?

Why am I so worried about being a good boy?

Why am I so worried about being a good girl?

Why am I so worried about being good?

(notice that the above is alphabetical)

Perhaps I worry too much.

Perhaps that's part of what makes me, me.

## old essay

---

Reasons for not thanking someone

January 27, 2004

There are many reasons for not doing. And many of these reasons are important: spending time with family, keeping up-to-date with the news and weather, and even relaxing – a respite for the body and mind.

Then there are the actual obstacles which must be surmounted. Some are small and some are large. Connecting the computer to the Internet, or buying stamps and addressing an envelope, is a small thing. But when there are other important reasons relentlessly pursuing limited time, these small things encourage the devotion of attention to other reasons.

The large obstacles often require special knowledge or skill to surmount. How do you find someone after so much time? And how exactly was that last name spelled?

And finally, even if we somehow summon the will and jump the hurdles, how do you express with words the emotion which led us to this point? How do you explain why that – maybe it's something as simple as a smile – why that smile meant so much to you, why it touched your life? What do you say?

But if you were to ask that person, you'll find that it's not what you say, but that you say. It's not the words you said, but that you took the time to say them. Just saying is the important thing.

And it often boils down to the only two words you really can say.

Thank you.

## PC

---

I just got a new wireless notebook.

Fresh and clean.

There's nothing quite like it.

Every word written on it is new.

Just for that feeling alone

it's worth buying a new one.

I really should indulge myself more often.

It's like cleaning house or doing laundry.

Should I get a new one once a month?

Does any one else share my joy?

The joy in fondling a new legal pad.

# iRant

---

heaven forbid you should be inspired

shut out the world  
stick in those earbuds  
turn up the volume  
drown out the noise

drown out the beauty  
of a mud-filled pothole  
of a paint-flaked fence  
of a distant bird

heaven forbid you should risk  
learning something new about yourself  
or about your world  
you might not like it

birds are over-rated

just turn up Dido  
again  
listen to track three  
again  
learn that  $2+2=4$   
again

never question  
never turn over a new leaf  
never know thyself  
never learn

## fencepost 255

---

Interviewer: Hi, do you mind if I talk with you for minute or two?

Interviewee: Oh, me? No. No, not at all.

Interviewer: How are you?

Interviewee: Why do you want to talk with me?

Interviewer: Actually, I was riding a tram the other day. Well, I mean, I usually ride the tram and I noticed you for the first time. You just caught my eye for some reason. I just wanted to get to know you a little better.

Interviewee: Oh. That seems a bit strange. You mean the tram that passes by here every day?

Interviewer: Yeah, several times a day, in fact.

Interviewee: Almost every ten minutes. Why did I catch your eye?

Interviewer: I was just looking out the window and noticed you had a patch of brown toward your top. You were just a little different.

Interviewee: Yeah, I've had that for a while.

Interviewer: How did you get it?

Interviewee: It's been a long time. Why do you want to know? I'm happy for the conversation, but it is a bit odd. I've never known anyone to actually sit down and talk to one of us before.

Interviewer: Just curious. I figured no one talked with any of you. Just abused you in one way or another. Climbing over you or hitting you or something. I just wanted to spend a little time to get to know one of you a little better.

Interviewee: Well, we were all getting painted. It's a special kind of paint, you know. I am, after all, made of iron.

Interviewer: Yeah, I guessed that.

## fencepost 255

---

Interviewee: This was several years ago. Or more likely longer than that, but I lose track of time. Anyway, my painter was running late - or, rather, it was getting late in the afternoon and evening and he had to get home. The coat of paint that covered that part of my upper member wasn't as thick as the rest of me and wore off. Not off entirely, but the weather got to it sooner than otherwise. That's why you see it rusted before the rest of me.

Interviewer: Oh, that explains it.

Interviewee: I hope you weren't expecting anything exciting.

Interviewer: I wasn't expecting anything really. I just noticed it and thought I'd ask.

Interviewee: Perhaps it says more about you than about me.

Interviewer: What? That I noticed you?

Interviewee: No, that you actually stopped in the first place.

Interviewer: Maybe.

Interviewee: I'm still not sure I understand why you stopped exactly.

Interviewer: I don't know. I like the idea of seeing something for the first time even though you might have passed it a hundred times before.

Interviewee: But there's still a difference between seeing something and actively going out and interviewing it.

Interviewer: Yeah, that's true. And I have to admit that most of the time, I am an arm-chair world-watcher. I don't do this every day.

Interviewee: This doesn't happen to me every day either.

Interviewer: I guess there's the obvious question . . .

Interviewee: No, don't ask it.

Interviewer: . . . about how many times this has happened to you. Why not?

## fencepost 255

---

Interviewee: I think it'll make me feel lonely.

Interviewer: Hmm. Are you sorry I came?

Interviewee: No, not at all. I do wish I could interview some of the people I see on the tram.

Interviewer: Oh, that's interesting. I hadn't thought that you also see us.

Interviewee: Oh yes, every day. I rather envy you. But only sometimes. It seems awfully noisy and busy out there.

Interviewer: It can be. It is.

Interviewee: Maybe it's time for you to get going?

Interviewer: Probably. Oh, but one more thing, what should I call you? Or, what do you prefer to be called?

Interviewee: What do you mean?

Interviewer: Do you have a name?

Interviewee: No. No name. No one else has bothered naming me.

Interviewer: Are you a railing or . . .

Interviewee: Oh, you mean, type?

Interviewer: . . . It can be.

Interviewee: I prefer fence.

Interviewer: So I should call you a fencepost?

Interviewee: But we're all fenceposts.

Interviewer: Anything more specific?

## fencepost 255

---

Interviewee: I am the 255th on this side.

Interviewer: Okay. So, fencepost 255.

Interviewee: Sure, that'll be fine.

Interviewer: Well, I'm glad to have met you.

Interviewee: Yeah, thanks for coming over. I've enjoyed our little chat.

Interviewer: Me too. Thanks again.

Interviewee: Thanks for paying attention. Good-bye.

That's what you told me to call it.  
you made an impression  
and I so much wanted to be a good girl

You wanted me to be a good girl too.

but this rule I remember breaking  
consciously  
deliberately

I was with a group of other girls  
giggling  
I was just going along with the crowd

we all sinned  
we all whispered, "loo"  
we all giggled

as I look back on it, no big deal  
but it made an impression at the time

as I look back on it, I was too young  
you were proud  
I was scared  
as I went to my first confession

I told the priest  
in some shy words  
that I had had had wanted to go to the loo  
he didn't understand  
he didn't try to understand  
he told me to come up with another confession  
(just for the record, I did)

I wish I could say that that was the moment  
I lost my faith  
or when I decided to run away from home  
or when I decided to become pregnant by 17  
just to show him what real sin really was

but there was nothing that dramatic

I was just a little girl  
I was just confused  
I just returned to my room  
I just cried

whose rules do I follow  
how do I be a good girl

## hand-in-hand

---

opposites can not only attract  
they can co-exist  
they can be mutual

I'm thinking of life and death

they can walk down the street  
together hand-in-hand  
a smiling mother whose full of cancer  
a beautiful woman side by side with a striking boyfriend  
a little girl chasing a ball into a street

but more than that  
a person's reason for living  
is often their reason for dying  
a soldier in a war  
a fire-fighter in a fire  
a mother in childbirth

and so if we take away  
all sickness and accidents and death  
if we cure all diseases  
and be able to live forever  
and make death a thing of the past  
won't we also be getting rid of life

## personal ad: wanted

---

two arms

period  
the rest of the body is optional

sometimes I would want  
those two arms  
to be kind and comforting  
in my sorrow

sometimes I would want  
those two arms  
to be strong and protecting  
in my uncertainties

sometimes I would want  
those two arms  
to be stable and unmoving  
just to hold me  
just to hold me  
just to hold me  
when the rest of the world shakes

but most of the time  
I would just want the comfort of knowing  
those two arms  
were there  
for me  
at the ready

oddly  
I know my hitman  
has also placed an ad for the same  
two arms

## personal ad: about me

---

damaged goods -  
how do you respond the day after  
when someone casually and insincerely asks  
how are you  
physically, that's what it was designed for  
how do you fix a shattered window

fragile -  
and I cry a lot even when jarred  
I should have asked for two Waterproof arms  
I can still break  
that worries me too

just a little girl hiding  
with no where to run  
surrounded by Daleks  
fearful of the Dalek within herself  
not sure where to turn

like everyone else in that sense

friendly -  
to sticks and stones  
yes, they can hurt  
more often, they are diversionary  
does "cutter" mean anything to you  
words are what I'm deathly afraid of

enough

## The Confrontation

---

Guy: What is this one going to be?

Novatia: I'm confronting my fear.

Guy: Of what?

Novatia: Of you.

Guy: Of me?

Novatia: I am so afraid of being yelled at. Rats. I'm starting to cry already. Sorry. I didn't want to do that.

Guy: Why are you afraid of me?

Novatia: I'm afraid you're going to tell me I'm doing something wrong. I mean, this is your website and you have a particular dream for it. Maybe I'm being too personal or maybe I'm putting too much up. I've tried to hide my identity pretty well. I don't know. I guess I'm not making much sense. It's just that I finally found someplace that in the outlying backwaters of the Internet where I feel I can write and express myself and I'm afraid I'm doing something wrong.

Guy: What's wrong with writing?

Novatia: Maybe I'm too personal for what you wanted. I just don't want to be found out by anyone I know either. I'm terrified. Maybe it's just self expression.

Guy: You have written some mighty personal stuff recently.

Novatia: I know and a lot of it is dark. I hope I'm not always dark. Maybe it's just the mood I'm in right now. All life paths have rocks on them and maybe I just hit one. Or maybe this was just waiting for the right place to unleash itself. It's hard to have all this in you and not feel you can express it.

Guy: But you're worried I'm going to yell at you for expressing it?

## The Confrontation

---

Novatia: Absolutely. I'm afraid you're going to tell me this isn't the right place for it. That there's women's forums or personal blogs or something. That . . . I don't know. That just when I come out and find a place where I feel comfortable to talk, that I'm told I'm wrong or bad and that this isn't the right place.

Guy: But I'm not . . .

Novatia: And that's also why I'm so afraid of the "comment" section too. Maybe someone else will say the same thing; one of the founders or beginners. I'm just afraid.

Guy: That's why you're writing this.

Novatia: To confront my fears, yes. And to express them. And maybe, just maybe, for you to read them. So that if you do have to yell at me and tell me that this isn't the right place for me, that you will do it kindly. I feel so, so exposed and fragile. I'm crying again. Sorry.

Guy: That's okay. I'm not judging you. I will say this, that this little short story or whatever it is, is a bit odd. I'm not used to reading something with my name on it.

Novatia: I just felt the need to explain myself. Maybe that's part of my character. I've always had these conversations in my head with other people. I have to admit this is the first time I've actually written one down while it was happening.

Guy: You've talked to yourself before?

Novatia: Well, prepared myself for conversations. It's part of my fear, I suppose. If I'm afraid of being yelled at . . .

Guy: And being yelled at is the worse thing in the world; I have a hard time understanding that concept.

Novatia: I don't have much of a backbone.

Guy: That's not a bad thing. Even if it were true. It seems to me, from what I've read, you've been through a lot and yet you're still standing.

Novatia: I don't know what to say. Compliments are hard for me too.

Novatia: I really gotta go. I just heard the door. Maybe we can continue this later.

## The Confrontation, part 2

---

Novatia: I had to get back to this conversation. It's like walking on egg shells. I'm fearful and I have to be a little guarded now . . .

Guy: This is too weird. Nova, I'm not your father confessor or a shrink . . .

Novatia: And I don't want you to be . . .

Guy: And I don't want to be.

Novatia: This is just something that I have to get through.

Guy: I created this website as place to create art, as a place to place art.

Novatia: But I have to do this in order to express that art.

Guy: I'm not even sure what "this" is anymore. It's just an imaginary conversation you're having with yourself. It's more a stream of consciousness than anything else I can determine.

Novatia: And that's something else I wanted to mention. You have these tags and I'm not sure what to put. I've been listing "free verse" . . .

Guy: Yeah, I've noticed that. Not very descriptive.

Novatia: But I think it's up to the reader to determine what it says to them. What I might think is, I don't know, about a movie, they might think is politics.

Guy: I suppose that's true, but . . .

Novatia: And I don't want to be confined to specific formats either. I mean, I might start off something as a short story and then switch in the middle to a poem and then to a script. That, too, I think is up to someone else to decide. A mash-up amongst the poem, transcript and short story.

Guy: Oh for goodness sake, just make a decision. This is getting endless.

Novatia: Am I ruining things by . . .

## The Confrontation, part 2

---

Guy: No, of course not. There is no right or wrong. I certainly didn't intend anything to be so stressful.

Novatia: I just wanted to be a good girl.

Guy: But you're not that little girl anymore.

Novatia: Part of me is and hasn't grown up. Part of me is weak.

Guy: We're getting into shrink territory again.

Novatia: I don't mean to put that hat on you. I don't even need you to understand, though I hope you will, I just have to say it. I still want to be good, but part of being good is to be quiet . . .

Guy: Good girls are quiet?

Novatia: Maybe I grew up in a different era, I don't know. Girls were supposed to be quiet in class. Boys were the ones who answered questions. Anyway . . .

Guy: Hmmm.

Novatia: . . . just expressing myself in poems or whatever form isn't good so I'm afraid of ruining this good website you set up and if my style is even a little unorthodox . . .

Guy: It's a little more than a little.

Novatia: Then all the more reason for me to be fearful that you're gonna kick me off the island or yell at me.

Guy: I keep having these reality checks. This is an imaginary conversation you're having with yourself. This is weird.

Novatia: And actually, I haven't read any other works. I'm a bit . . .

Guy: What? Why not? There's good stuff on here.

## The Confrontation, part 2

---

Novatia: It's, again, me being scared. Then I'd have proof that I'm odd or that I'm being too personal or that I just don't belong.

Guy: But everyone is welcome.

Novatia: I'm just so afraid. I'm crying again. Sorry.

Guy: I must admit I am a bit taken aback by your fear of "being kicked off the island". I've given some thought to censorship for bad language or about "how to build a nuclear bomb" but nothing reaching whatever you've done.

Novatia: I just have experience with reaching out and having both arms chopped off. I guess I grow to expect this.

Guy: I'm sorry to hear that.

Novatia: You're putting on a shrink hat. I don't come here for that. But I'm grateful for any kind words. They are not the most common words I hear.

Guy: Why did you come here? I mean, to this website?

Novatia: It was small. Yet a place to be creative. Someplace where I could hide, where I could create a different identity and where not many people I know (not that I know many people) would go and recognize me. Oh, and I do want to say that although the comments and possible censorship scare me, it was warming when I got marked as someone's favourite. That was kind of nice; though I do come here to just to try to be left alone. Strange isn't it.

Guy: What do you mean?

Novatia: How we can want something and the exact opposite at the same time.

Guy: Two arms are for helping, but they can also hurt?

Novatia: Did you read that one?

Guy: I guess I should start reading in the order published, shouldn't I?

## The Confrontation, part 2

---

Novatia: Well, even if this is weird . . .

Guy: This is very weird.

Novatia: . . . thanks for letting it stay on your website; even if it's just for half a moment.

Guy: I would say, "it's been real" but given the circumstanc - - It's been surreal.

## not waving - drowning

---

I was not waving  
but drowning

– Stevie Smith

I had to get rid of most of my books when I moved.  
broke my heart

I still lust over the OED which I never did have.  
26 volumes of pure dictionary  
English major  
salivations

There's the rebel in me that loves arcane spellings.  
more than the odd color/colour controversy  
if it's in the dictionary it must be correct

Troublingly, I'm not as rebellious as I used to be  
not that I was ever very rebellious  
I tried to be a good girl  
I tried to listen  
I tried to follow the rules

Did you know that if you're lying out getting a tan on the beach in the sun in the summer next to the cool ocean - your body temperature can rise to find a new medium. If you suddenly get up and jump in the water, it'll thus be a shock to your body, you'll cramp up and drown.

Or so I was told.  
I don't recall by whom.  
In hindsight, I don't even know if it is true.  
But I believed it.

In later school years, I forget the point and the topic, but I can see the teacher's face. He didn't seem sadistic. Maybe it was The System. Query poised: if you were alone on a beach and saw a child drowning, would you jump in and save him? Anonymous yes or no, write your answer on a piece of paper, fold it in half and hand it to the front.

It has bothered me ever since. Now I have the skills to object. To object to the question. To object to questions which ask "who would you throw off the lifeboat". In child-speak: they're mean, they're not nice questions. Child-speak can be so clear.

## not waving - drowning

---

I was just a little girl  
wanting to be good  
I had to follow the rules as I was taught  
I wasn't taught to follow my heart  
and I could hear the headmaster  
and the other Adults Who Were In Charge  
hovering over me and yelling  
"Don't you remember your lesson?"

The next day the teacher said he was proud of us. There was only one person selfish enough to say, "no".

I didn't wave Stevie

## Ostentatious

---

Are my breasts symmetrical?  
I asked myself as I looked in the mirror this morning  
as I have from time to time before  
Does gravity make one droop more than another?

I don't obsess about it  
but it occurs to me that there might be some value  
in the question itself

who writes about such  
very raw  
earthy  
real  
like cleaning your fingernails or brushing your teeth  
the "underside" of human existence  
not on the peaks (the joys of an ice-cream cone or a day at the beach)  
and not the troughs (we won't go there)  
just the necessary "stuff" we have to do

And then my mind wandered to  
You know, I've been thinking about all these (what I call) free-verse "poems" that I write. I had the thought of writing a poem called "ostentatious" in iambic pentameter or some other very recognizable form. (I hadn't worked that out exactly.) But instead of riming the last word in the sentence, I would rime the \*second\* to last word - just to show you people that I could do it. Just to show my (imaginary) critics that I could do it. And be a kind of rebel at the same time.

But then I asked myself, "why". Why go through all that work? Although I firmly believe that I would really enjoy it once I got into it. I do enjoy working with structure like that from time to time. But mostly my approach has been to "write from the hip". To compose on the fly. That a poem written ten minutes later would be completely different. And that the only reason I write off-line is because I can save it - thus avoiding computer crashes. Another worry/fear of mine?

At any rate, that's why I fear my spelling can be off at times. Indeed, one of my favourite poems so far has been "trash talk" which was quite thought-out. But getting back on-point. I asked myself, "why".

why do you own all the stock futures of "Truth" or "Proper"

who says breasts are supposed to be symmetrical

## explanations of the everyday

---

Perhaps this is what blogs are good for.  
But searching through them can be very difficult.  
The compilation of data and information  
Maybe that's why God made Masters students

Perhaps we should write about everyday things. Describe the details of fingernail cleaning, toenail painting, laundry or . . .

I worry about being misinterpreted. About people seeing my actions in a way I don't intend. She walks or acts in a certain way, she was just asking for it.

I recently heard a commentary on NPR about a new television programme "black/white" where a black family is made-up as white and a white family is made-up as black. Do those two white women cross the street out of racism or is it out of a desire to avoid an obstacle in the sidewalk? The NPR programme also mentioned . . .

Before coming to the US, I had heard a radio report that it was impossible to grow up in this culture and not be a racist. While others objected to that description, it fed my fear of being misinterpreted. Of my actions being thought of as racist when I didn't think they were. But I also decided to keep an open mind and to try to "know thyself" better. Or, as I more often say, "always ask why".

I also heard or saw on the telly another news report about Detroit being the carjacking capital of the US. I fear many things. A self-admitted fraidy cat. We all have our problems, I guess. What I haven't heard is a retraction or a correction of that report even though I must have heard it over ten years ago. But it started me on a course, even when I was still in England, of . . .

. . . locking my car doors.

Most recently, I did it whilst driving home. I was at a stop light. There was this older bloke coming toward me in an opposing lane. Walking. White. Carrying a garbage bag with soda tins in it. I checked to make sure my doors were locked. They were. They always - well, mostly always - are. I've gotten into the habit of locking them when I'm in the car. And am uncomfortable until the doors ARE locked. Makes it harder for a car-jacker or purse-snatcher to just open the door and grab. I do get afraid a lot.

## explanations of the everyday

---

It's not usual for people to walk in the street. But I have locked the doors or checked to make sure they are locked when I see black youths walking around too. I hope they don't think it's a racist thing. I don't think it is. I'm pretty fearful regardless.

Though I have to admit, or ask myself, would I have checked my locks if I had seen a younger woman in a wedding dress walking down the street when I was stopped at the stop light? Smiling. Waving with one hand and carrying a matching-coloured small purse with the other? Or would I have been more curious? And does this make me a sexist monster if I judge her differently than I did the man? And if she were black, does this make me racist (or reverse-racist?) if I react differently than I did with the white man?

always ask why  
you can learn about yourself  
(or become more confused)  
but the important thing  
is asking the question itself

Scene: Small auditorium or gymnasium at a school or university with folding chairs set up for small audience. Stage area with lectern. Novatia discussing some of her writing and answering some queries from audience. Joining in progress.

Query: You abbreviated NPR in this work, why?

Nova: I was wondering about that. It stands for, in case you haven't figured it out, for National Public Radio. I was thinking about NPR as well as UK and USA and about how personal I should get in this essay. I wasn't sure how much information I should reveal. I don't like treating - well, I don't like explaining every abbreviation, like, USA equals United States of America; I mean, some things are obvious.

Nova: But as I've said before, I shoot from the hip, as it were. I try to let the essays and poems flow on their own. In this case, it also worried me a bit that I was revealing that I indeed came from England and moved to the US at some point. I wasn't sure I wanted to reveal all of that. But I thought it was necessary as I described "over here" or "over there". Does that make sense?

Query: What was the motivation for this poem or, I guess you call it, an academic paper?

Nova: I'll tell what pushed me over the edge to write it: it was the scene at the stop light. There are some things which stick out in my mind, which I can see like a photo. That's one of them. Although I don't remember anymore if I was actually driving or not, I remember the five-lane road, the traffic light being red, our car being the first one at the stop and being

## explanations of the everyday

---

in the left-most lane, but not the centre-turn lane. The white guy was facing us, coming toward us in the - I guess it would be his right-most lane? Let me think. I'm really bad with these spacial things. Well, he was in the left-most lane as he was - as I saw him, on-coming, or coming towards me. Scruffy-ish hair, blondish. A white garbage bag. [shakes head] I mean details like that, like in a photograph.

Nova: Similarly, I remember hearing on the radio that Detroit was the car-jacking capital. I don't know why I remember Detroit, but it was Detroit. And California was the car-something capital. Yeah, you laugh. But it was where people would come out of their cars in the traffic jam, when the cars were stopped and pull a gun out - you do like guns in this country, or the US does like guns [Scene note: this auditorium is in Canada] - and, at any rate [shakes head] - they would walk up to the other car with a gun and force the driver out at gunpoint. That was what California was the capital of - at least according to the same? - or similar radio news report I heard about the same time.

Nova: And that was in England. Again, just flashes of - I guess I call them "photographs" because I remember some of the details so well. Even though those last two were of radio reports. Sorry, I'm rambling again, but . . . [balance of transcript excised as it deals with other matters not related to this particular work]

## free form

---

Transcript of imaginary conversation between website creator and website user.

Guy: Ah. I see I've been summoned back into existence.

Novatia: Yeah. I hope you don't mind.

Guy: No. Do I get to say, "This is so weird" again? That's a tee-shirt.

Novatia, smiling: Sure.

Guy: Great.

Novatia: Very Monty-Pythonesque. I hope you don't mind.

Guy: No. Well, we'll see. I don't get a voice of my own. I mean, I can't create myself, so I have to take advantage of it when you give me a voice.

Novatia: Oh, I see. You mean, you're only a character when I create you, so you feel you have to speak when you have the chance.

Guy: Is that so strange?

Novatia: No, I guess not, but that's not the point.

Guy: No. Let's get down to business.

Novatia: Yes. Called you back into existence - -

Guy: Because you're afraid again.

Novatia: Yeah.

Guy: You don't have to be.

Novatia: So people keep saying. But I do get worried and I have to acknowledge my feelings.

Guy: I guess I understand that, but I've said that "everything goes".

## free form

---

Novatia: But I treat you like an old English teacher who can slap my wrist with a ruler when I get out of line and do something wrong.

Guy: But I'm not that either. I'm the creator of the place where you can create. I'm not an English professor myself.

Novatia: But still . . .

Guy: But still, I think I get your point. You have to express yourself for your own benefit, not for mine. I think I understand that.

Novatia: Thanks.

Guy: So what did you do?

Novatia: I've been exploring "free-form" more. I added a discussion-type section to the end of one of my poems. Actually, I think I classified it as an academic work.

Guy: You did.

Novatia: I noticed you had listed "script" as one of the "types of works" tags that I should select - or, sorry, could select to describe the work and decided to mash-up the script or transcript in my work, as I had done with the poem, blog and essay in my previous stuff.

Guy: And you worry I'll "throw you off the island" because of it.

Novatia: Yeah. I don't read a lot, but from what I've read - I haven't seen this done before; so I can just imagine people getting mad at me. Or my English teacher slapping my hand with a ruler.

Guy: Did you really have an English teacher like that?

Novatia: No, this is figurative.

Guy: Oh.

Novatia: But the feeling is real.

## free form

---

Guy: I see.

Novatia: But I like doing it \*because\* it hasn't been done before.

Guy: Sort of a civil war of sorts of feelings.

Novatia: Very much so.

Guy: I did read it this time, before I read this, this imaginary "transcript", I guess we're calling it, and it rather surprises me.

Novatia: Oh? In what way?

Guy: Well, you make yourself out to be so afraid, and yet you put yourself on a stage in front of an audience? Public speaking makes ME terrified and I don't think I'm alone.

Novatia: Oh, that.

Guy: It just seems like a contradiction in character.

Novatia: It is. And it's fascinating. And it's actually a long story.

Guy: Hey, I'm imaginary. I've got time.

Novatia, smiling: I guess so.

Guy: So this would be a combination of a short story and a script?

Novatia: It's turning out that way.

Guy: That's fine. Shoot.

Novatia: I was on this tour of Europe some time ago. Well, first of all, let me say that I AM a terrified little girl. This stage-thing is just an anomaly that surprises me as much as anyone else. But let me start at the beginning.

## free form

---

Novatia: I was on this tour of Europe many years ago and I was travelling by train from Moscow to St. Petersburg or Leningrad or whatever it was called at the time and we had to stop at some small town the train usually passes right by because the train was snowed in. The passengers were bussed off to some local residences to spend the night. It was a fascinating experience. Apparently they were “volunteered” to do this, but they were happy to see me, and we stayed up late into the night talking. It was a great experience.

Novatia: Anyway, this lady was the local teacher of English at the school and she was thrilled to have a native English speaker with her. This was why I was selected, or why she was selected to have me stay with her. Anyway, as we talked, I mentioned that I had done some, what would I call it here? Some daycare work at a local community centre in England, and she somehow got it into her head that this made me a teacher of children and that I should come to her school and address her students, and how her students would love it, and how they would learn so much just by hearing the intonation of a native speaker and so on.

Novatia: Well, I couldn't say, “no”. She had been so nice, letting me stay in her house and all. So she stayed up half the night getting permission for me to stay the next day; I don't know how she did it. But anyway, I went to the school the next day and I had a great time. It was the most surprising thing I ever did. I didn't have any preparation. I was nervous as all get out, but once I walked up there - it was like I had a different personality. I was comfortable and easy. I was absolutely amazed at myself. She said I looked like “a fish in water”.

Guy, laughing: Oh, like the opposite of “a fish out of water”.

Novatia: Yeah, this is why they wanted a native speaker, you see.

Guy: Did you finish your trip?

Novatia: Yeah, I - that afternoon they drove me to the next city, or actually the previous city where the train stopped and I was on my way.

Guy: Well, that's interesting.

Novatia: But I never did it again. I don't know if I never had the opportunity or never took the opportunity - -

Guy: Well, we don't need native English speakers.

Novatia: That's true.

## free form

---

Guy: But you never did any more public speaking.

Novatia: No. Maybe I've been too afraid that I'd be too afraid next time and I didn't want to spoil the memory. I don't know. But I never forgot it. It was a real boost for my self-confidence.

Guy: Or lack thereof.

Novatia: Exactly.

Guy: So this imaginary stage occupation is based on that?

Novatia: Well, sort of. I've been really sick recently and I spent a lot of time in bed -

Guy: Oh, I'm -

Novatia: - and ever since I've discovered this website - - well, actually before that. I've always had a vivid imagination. I would imagine myself in different situations. Like winning the Nobel prize or whatever. And what I would say on stage. And I always remembered that time in Russia and tried to imagine the questions and how good it made me feel that I could be helpful and answer them and how enthusiastic they seemed to be.

Novatia: And I don't want to be arrogant or anything, but I have imagined winning some award for one of these poems and travelling to Canada, where this website is, to accept it and what I would say on stage. It gets kind of boring in bed all the time and this is a good escape.

Guy: So that's what you wrote down.

Novatia: Yeah. And it did serve as an additional mash-up of adding a script to the end of a poem.

Guy: Or in this case an academic essay.

Novatia: Oh, yeah, an essay.

Guy: And you feel you have to write about it -

## free form

---

Novatia: Again because it's different; to explain myself. Maybe so I won't get kicked off the island, as you've said.

Guy: As you've said. I was quoting you.

Novatia: Yeah, right.

Guy: Again, I think this is strange. I never thought I'd find myself as an imaginary character in someone else's composition.

Novatia: I know, I'm just -

Guy: And I'm not a psychiatrist or anything like that nor am I an expert in compositions or art. I don't know what's good (but I know what I like) or what will win awards. I don't want to sound generally crass, but keep in mind, I need to generate some coin too.

Novatia: I know, but -

Guy: Nova, I'm not your counselor, but - oh, but let me make it clear that I'm not doing this strictly for the money either, I think that's clear too - but - Nova, ah, -

Novatia: I'm frustrating you.

Guy: Sometimes, yeah. I just wish you had more self-confidence, more of a backbone. You really don't need my approval.

Novatia: In the back of my head I know that, but I get so scared.

Guy: Listen, I understand you, for whatever reason, need to write stuff like this transcript, and I guess that's fine by me too; but understand that you don't have to write this for me. If you have to write it for you, then write it for you; but you don't have to write it for me.

Novatia: Thanks.

## free form

---

Guy: The stories are reasonably interesting -

Novatia: Thanks.

Guy: - but you don't have to do it for me.

Novatia: Thanks.

Guy: And I still think it's a little weird - and you don't have to say, "thanks".

## Blue Gum Balls

---

There was this candy store down the street from us when I was growing up. Well, it wasn't really a candy store. It did sell other things. In fact, it sold a lot of other things. But at the time, the most important thing to me that it sold was candy.

A group of us girls would go down there and pick out gum balls. We'd then play in the park across the street.

It was about as scientific as six year olds could get. Testing different coloured gum balls to see which could turn your teeth the boldest colour. Blue was the best.

Girls giggling in the park. Pure. Innocent.

## diamond ring

---

another fear  
but it's not likely I have to worry  
still, I hope I'm not offered  
a diamond ring

I can't really leave  
so I can't really say no  
if I'm not free to leave  
I can't really agree  
to a diamond ring

I know I'm "kept"  
and it's comforting in a way  
but it means I must be near  
always within arms reach  
even when I want to run away  
like a diamond ringed

or caged or gaoled  
but bars can be comforting  
but bars can be conflicting  
they keep many scary things out  
but they keep one scary thing in  
and sometimes that scary thing  
is him

pride is wrong, pride is bad  
excessive humility was never preached against  
so I don't know the limits  
I have to say that I don't say  
that I'm a diamond  
but he says that

## diamond ring

---

and it was all very flattering at first  
until his arms became fickle  
but I don't want to be too harsh  
a girl could do much worse  
I've been there too  
I was also taught to count my blessings

one aspect of a diamond might fit  
I've had down time to ponder it

I remember being in school, but this strains my memory rather a bit, and my knowledge of geology. In physical sciences (?) we were taught that a lone light bulb in a room - if you turn that light bulb on in a bright room, and take the same light bulb and put it in a dark room, that light bulb will look brighter. It looks brighter in a dark room. I don't remember much else about the lesson, I just remember that tidbit.

I also remember in geology class (?) that we were taught about the sparkling of diamonds. They apparently only shine in light, or rather, they only reflect the light around them. So, they look dark when everything around them is dark, and bright when everything around them is bright. That's why spelunkers take torches with them. The torches, or flash lights, hit the walls and if they hit diamonds or other gemstones, those stones gleam in the light - that light is bounced back or reflected back. There is no gleaming before the light came.

like a diamond, I am, in that sense  
I reflect my mood, my surroundings, my history  
I'm not a very good liar  
how do you make a happy poem  
when you're bruised

maybe I'm wrong  
I was just trying to figure it out  
I had the time  
by myself, lying in bed, recovering  
or trying to recover  
why would you push a diamond

I just assumed it was me  
it was I who had erred  
maybe what I was taught in geology class  
about its refractive properties was what he meant  
when he called me  
his diamond

## final Guy talk

---

Guy: Doing this again?

Novatia: I know. And I know this is boring to everyone, but it's something I have to do. I keep this anonymous and I don't have anyone else to talk to. I have to get it out of my system. It's like - - I wanted to start doing some other work but I had to address this issue first because it was bugging me so much. You don't have to read it; but I have to write it.

Scene: White, square room. Room 101. Guy in one corner, Nova in the opposing corner. No obvious door.

Novatia: [sitting on floor, crunched into ball, bursting into tears]

Guy: I don't know what to do; I just design the website. I don't know what you want me to do. This is weird. I don't like to see anyone in pain, but I don't understand.

Novatia: Maybe I just had to get it out of me.

Guy: What do you want from me?

Novatia: Just to borrow your ears for a while.

Guy: You mean you need me to listen?

Novatia: Is that too much to ask?

Guy: In a way, yes. I'm not here to provide comfort; I've just designed the website.

Novatia: Perhaps I should do something else, but I get so scared.

Guy: Listen, you might need help, but not from me. I don't want to get involved in your world.

Novatia: Okay.

Guy: Try to direct your energies some other place.

## final Guy talk

---

Novatia: I'm not sure what I can do.

Guy: I'm sure you'll think of something.

Novatia: For the record, I was thinking of e-mailing you directly asking if using your name was okay.

Guy: Why didn't you?

Novatia: Because I was scared you'd say, "no" and I really needed this form of expression. I needed some way to get my fears and tears out.

Guy: I don't mean to yell.

Novatia: No, no. I should have asked before. It's been - It's been "fun".

## standardized examinations

---

Multiple Choice.

Question:

Which one does not belong?

- A. Add
- B. Subtract
- C. Multiply
- D. Increase

Answer:

D. Increase. The others are mathematical operations.

or

B. Subtract. The others deal with raising, whereas this selection deals with lowering.

or

A. Add. The others all have eight letters.

or

C. Multiply. The others contain the letter "a".

Who is to decide? And what makes one person's answer wrong and another's right? And is it worth causing such trauma and stress to someone who desperately wants to answer the question correctly and doesn't want to get yelled at for answering it wrong?

Perhaps the point is that there is no right answer.

Audience/Reader: Novatia, that's just a well crafted, well thought out example. I'm sure that doesn't exist on "real" standardized tests.

Novatia: Then let me give you this real-life example:

## standardized examinations

---

I had to change doctors recently and when I went into the office, they gave me a four-page form to fill out. One of the standard fill-in-the-blank questions after the “address” section was:

Other States Lived In: \_\_\_\_\_

It is very important to give accurate and complete information to your doctor so that s/he can provide you with the best care possible. But how do I answer this question? I have never lived in any other State of the United States, but I have lived in other countries until relatively recently. However there was no question about other countries lived in. Surely other countries lived in is far more important, for health reasons, than other States lived in, isn't it? I mean, all of the States are pretty close together as far as standard of living and standard of health goes; whereas there is a wide, wide disparity amongst the various countries of the world.

Other States Lived In: \_\_\_\_\_

The question kept staring me in the face. How do I answer it? If there was no space about other countries lived in. I want to be a good girl and answer the question correctly. Do I add a space for other countries? But surely if other States were important enough to include on the form, the far more important “other countries” would have been included. Then I looked more closely at the question.

Other States Lived In: \_\_\_\_\_

Ah! It was all capitalized. I had been misreading it. It was supposed to be, “Other states lived in”. So I started writing, “hazy, clear, confused . . .”

Yeller: Don't be such a smart arse!

I quickly crossed off the answers. I am so afraid of being yelled at. The question remained.

Other States Lived In: \_\_\_\_\_

What do I do? I just want to be a good girl. I try so hard. And no one sees my struggles. Daily. Okay, maybe I don't climb mountains or build bridges - but can't you see that the

## standardized examinations

---

burden of sitting in that office is just as painful for me as climbing a mountain is for someone else? Mountain climbers get all the glory. No one claps for me when I achieve.

Other States Lived In: \_\_\_\_\_

The question remains. Why do you do this to us? Why do you make it so hard? Why am I left to guess what you mean on your own form? Why don't you make it easy? Did you really mean to cause so much stress?

Reader: What did you do?

I wiped a suppressed tear from my eye and left the question blank. The nurse took the form from me and the doctor saw me even though the question was blank - I guess I didn't know that was legal.

I left and no one asked about it. No one knew about my struggle. Or pain. I certainly was worse off.

But if it were that important to put on the form and to cause so much stress, why not even ask about it?

I don't like standardized examinations.

## a gift unwanted

---

This isn't exactly my story. I don't remember exactly where I heard it. But I suppose stories needn't be the exact truth. Shakespeare, after all, wasn't exactly Richard III. Dante, after all, didn't exactly visit hades. T.S. Elliot, after all - - on second thought, I actually can believe that he communed with cats.

It's a mid-western story from some time ago. Though I suppose it could happen anywhere. Unlikely though. It seems typically American. Zany.

Some club put on a contest. It made money selling tickets to it. A raffle of sorts. A car was donated. Participants would touch the car. The person who held their hand on the car the longest would win the car. Free.

Twenty hours later. Ten people left. A ten minute bathroom break every hour. The sponsors wanted no one to get hurt. But it was self-induced torture. Amongst the participants a sense of family developed. The bond grew as time went on.

Twenty six hours. Five people left. Though tired and sleep deprived, the five were amazingly supportive of each other. Not at all cut throat, as they were in the beginning. They had been talking with each other. They knew each other. They had become friends.

Thirty hours. Three people left. My imagination takes over. I become a participant. The third participant, through lack of sleep, mindlessly scratches his nose, with the wrong hand. This makes two.

The first participant, this First Among Equals, Fae, initially bragged, over thirty hours ago, that she would do anything to win. But that was a long time ago. And now I reveal my power. My heretofore hidden power. My absolute power. To determine the winner. I explain calmly.

Novatia: I am going to count down from five. When I reach zero, I will deliberately and purposefully remove my hand from this car.

Fae: What?

Novatia: Five.

## a gift unwanted

---

Fae: Don't you want to win?

Novatia: I've given this a great deal of thought over the past thirty hours. I've decided to bring this contest to a conclusion. Four.

Fae: But I don't want to win like this.

Novatia: When we began this contest, you said you would do whatever it took to win. You want to win, don't you? Three.

Fae: But I want to win fair and square.

Novatia: Consider it a gift from me to you. Every time you get in the car, you will have to think that I gave this car to you. Two.

Fae: But I want to win. I don't want you to give it to me.

Novatia: Then remove your hand first. One.

I must confess that I don't understand Fae's objection. She got into the race for the purpose of gaining the car. I am, perhaps, allowing her to win in a way which she did not expect. But she gains that which she sought.

Fae's reactions are completely imaginary and perhaps I'm all wet. Perhaps her reactions would be completely different. I'm not an expert in Americana. But I can see me reacting as portrayed above.

Perhaps this is why the Good Lord did not grant me the stamina (nor inclination) to hold my hand against the side of a car for thirty hours. Something else to be thankful for.?

## time slices

---

Dante arose from the Inferno at my university. He spread about campus, lecture hall to lecture hall, rapidly. [insert colourful analogy here] Like deep plumes of hellfire playing a fortissimo toccata on Sahara dried kindling. [something like that only more gaudy] It was the time of final examinations. When we went into the hall and saw the chalkboard, we were greeted with the words engraved above the portals of hell:

### *Abandon Every Hope All Ye Who Enter Here*

After all the stress of studying, it was remarkably comforting. Strange. I smiled. Many laughed and made wise-cracks. A written sound-byte. Quickly followed by the stress of the examination itself.

Stress before. Stress afterwards. Yet there was that thin sliver of joy stuck in-between. There was joy in small slice of time which is immutable.

I wish I were better  
at sorting, gathering, collecting, holding, cherishing  
those time slices of joy

and forgetting the rest  
or at least de-emphasizing the rest  
or at least putting on equal footing the rest  
instead of forgetting the joy

I want to remember  
the fun of baking cookies (which nobody liked)  
the beauty of the vase (which later broke)  
the romantic meal (without the ignored “no”)

But I’m not very good at that.  
Indeed I tend to do the opposite  
I tend to remember the negative

I get so scared.

Reader: What does that mean?

## time slices

---

Novatia: I don't bake cookies anymore because I'm afraid he won't like them and will get mad at me. I know what he likes from the store, so I'll just buy them.

Reader: So you deprive yourself of the fun of cooking?

Novatia: It's a small price to pay.

Reader: I forget the song, but, "it's the person who's afraid of falling who never learns to dance."

Novatia: So you're saying I'm wrong. That my approach to the situation is the bad one.

Reader: I'm saying there's a cost to what you are doing.

Novatia: And I know there is a cost to what you say. I have to try - in fact some might say that I have a duty to keep Novatia safe.

Reader: Not cooking keeps you safe?

Novatia: You know I don't like those cookies!

Reader: That's his voice, isn't it?

Novatia: Why risk it? It's such a little thing.

Reader: But those little things can add up. My gosh, it's like walking on egg-shells.

Novatia: Is there not risk in everything we do? You're going to call me wrong, my method wrong when you don't know all the information - you would react differently to avoid being hit.

Novatia: It's not so bad. Sometimes when he's gone for several days on business, I bake cookies just for the fun of it. And then throw the cookies away. People then look down on me and criticise me for being wasteful. There's no way to win.

I wish I were better at capturing  
and treasuring  
those precious joyous time slices

## prejudices

---

prejudices  
pre-judging someone based on superficialities  
usually colours

Yaks? I forget what they called it. It's interesting how some details stick and how some fade away into the mists of memory. And I'm not that old. Young Adult Catholics? Some church youth group for older teenagers.

We were given a test. A test to see if we were racists. Or prejudicial. I don't think they made a distinction between the two. Being prejudicial was, of course, bad.

Get 8 out of 10 and you had a serious problem; 5 to 7 you were borderline; 1 to 3 you were okay. As I look back on it, I don't think such a scale had the Vatican's approval. I don't know who approved it. But I wasn't sophisticated enough to ask questions like that back then.

But I was old enough to be afraid. I don't know when that started.

The questions were remarkably similar, but focused on different superficials. If you were walking down the street and saw someone coming toward you . . .

Question: Would you treat someone differently if they were wearing different clothes than you?

Novatia: Yes.

Question: Would you - -

Novatia: Wait, don't I get to explain?

Question: No. This is just a "yes" or "no" type examination.

Novatia: Oh, sorry.

Question: Just fill in the boxes and I'll go over the answers later.

Novatia: Okay.

Question: Would you treat someone differently if they had different hair colour than you?

Novatia: Yes.

## prejudices

---

And so forth.

I failed dismally. But never got a chance to explain. I was labeled. And that was that.

But it was the same church that taught me to prejudge people. To stay away from people who were wearing “will you be my whore” tee-shirts. They told me to stay away from them, for my own safety. And punk-rockers with their spiked green hair were the worst. They use drugs, you told me. Stay away from them, you said.

you said the world was filled with evil monsters  
who could breathe fire and hurt me  
and lead me astray  
and make me do bad things  
you really scared me  
you really scarred me  
I believed you

and then you said that I was being bad  
for seeing your evil monsters behind every corner  
I didn't want to get hurt like you said I would be  
(as it turns out I got hurt anyway)  
and I'm still scared  
and I'm still scarred  
and I also believed you  
when you said I was bad

now I'm afraid of everything  
the monsters are now within  
they yell with their comments  
they yell by not making comments

sometimes breathing  
just breathing  
is all Novatia can handle

# Labour

---

Just thinking of the word for a moment, it can mean work or even the specific work involved in birth. If you divide the word, I'm sure you can think of a sentence with the structure, ". . . lab, our . . ."

And then there's foreign words. I'm not sure if "la bour" is a proper French word or not. My French is rusty. And whilst we're on confessions, so is my Latin and Old English. I always wanted to study Greek. Any language that writes with triangles I thought was pretty cool. The capital Delta.

And then there's the bloody Americans who always want to drop the "u" from perfectly good words. All in the name of speed and efficiency, I expect. But there's one Labour that would remain with the "u" even in America.

I was political at a young age. Just because the Labour party included a rose on its campaign posters and signs. It was my first political letter.

Well, for the sake of accuracy, our class might have written Prime Minister Thatcher a group letter or something. And then there were always notes to the Queen, but those don't really count as political.

Most things fade from memory. And again I want to emphasize that I'm not that old. It's just that some things stick and some things don't. I don't remember who my letter was to or what it was about. I don't even remember getting a letter back from him. Well, maybe I remember getting a letter back from him. He was so kind to write a signed letter back to a child. I'm sure he had other things to do.

But I do remember discovering that letter amongst my papers years later as a teenager as I was rummaging through an old box. I remember the letterhead.

From The Office  
Of The Leader  
Of The Opposition

I thought it was so cool. First there was "The" opposition. Not just "an" opposition.

But my favourite was the capitalised Opposition. As if all that stood between the populace and eternal chaos was this small band of freedom fighters.

## Labour

---

I just thought I'd share that.

Scene: Small auditorium or gymnasium at a school or university with folding chairs set up for small audience. Stage area with lectern. Novatia discussing some of her writing and answering some queries from audience. Joining in progress.

Question: This is the second time you added a Discussion section to one of your writings; why did you do that?

Novatia: I was going to do it more often, but it just didn't feel right. This time it felt like it was okay. In fact, I'll tell you exactly when it happened, it was on Blue Gum Balls. That was the story or poem I wrote right after my first Discussion section. As originally conceived in my mind, Blue Gum Balls was a much longer work, but all of a sudden it just stopped. It just stopped on its own. It felt like that was a good place to end. And I didn't feel the need to add a discussion section.

Novatia: In a way it was very freeing. No longer did I feel the obligation to mash-up different forms of short stories and poems and so forth. So just kept the discussion section in the back of my mind. This time it felt like I would add it again. Partly due to a fear which I'm not going to discuss right now.

Question: Oh, well now I have two questions, will you tell us your fear later?

Novatia: Maybe, it depends on how things shake out. I have a loose form or structure in my head. One problem is that sometimes things explode into novels. They get too big. I'm trying to reign this one in or at least be able to divide it into sections. We'll see how it works.

Question: My original question was, um, with all due respect, I hate discussion sections. And mash-ups aren't my favourite thing in the world either.

Novatia: That's perfectly all right. I can understand why they aren't everyone's cup of tea. The problem that was facing me is that I have a lot of down time. I get sick and spend a lot of time in bed for one reason or another. During those times my imagination takes over. It occurred to me, "why waste those thoughts?" Why not write out some of those imaginary conversations instead of losing them forever to the ether. And I'll let other people be the judge if they contain something valuable or not.

## Labour

---

Novatia: My other response is to mash-ups in general. When you come out of a movie or after you read a book, you don't remember every single thing that has been said. You remember a line or two. So, I figure that if you like the poetic part of a mash-up and not the short story part, you can concentrate on that and ignore the rest. It's like the concept I mentioned in Time Slices. If only we could remember the joy of baking the cookies rather than the pain of remembering that no one liked the taste of them, we would all be much better off.

Novatia: So, for example, if you like the concept of a "ringed diamond" in Diamond Ring, then think about that concept. You don't have to concentrate on the prose that's stuck in the middle of the poem - or even the rest of the poem for that matter. I'm just glad you found something in the poem that helped you in some small way.

Question: Can you explain the tone or style you decided to use in Labour?

Novatia: Is that different from the rest of my work?

Novatia: Sure. In this case I was actually aware as I was writing it - well, let me see. I was trying to think of how to classify it on the website where it was originally posted. I was going to list it as a short story. But I have listed things before as conversational. The style of this piece seemed to be a kind of camp-fire story. A conversational story. In the style of something you tell someone else, rather than a refined short story.

## coloured white

---

Perhaps I should use “colored”  
Perhaps I was just isolated before  
across the pond in the UK

I don't remember the context  
or even if it was directed at me  
but I remember (over)hearing the question  
was he colored

I remember it because it struck me as odd  
I myself am coloured white  
others are coloured black  
there are also shades in-between  
but they are no less colours

Sometimes my colours change  
pinkish toenails, reddish lips  
blueish teeth - but that's a different poem  
I even went all goth one day  
just for the fun of it

people of color  
who isn't

## the beast of s/he

---

Even the harshest word preserves communication;  
it is silence which separates

– Socrates

(At least I think it was Socrates. My Greek philosophy is a little rusty. So if you're out there Epictetus, please don't sue me.)

I attended a mixed-age university course. An older fellow was making an argument or telling a story or making a point - - No, that's just it. He wasn't allowed to make his point. He made reference to an unknown person using the masculine pronoun. And the professor interrupted him. And uttered, "or she".

The professor apparently thought the point the professor was making in his utterance was far more important than the fellow's point. The class generally protested. I sympathised with the fellow. He was likely old enough to have been taught in school to use the masculine pronoun at all times.

I have no other memory of that university course. I have no idea what the subject was. Yet [edited number] years later I still recall my dismay at the professor's treatment of that fellow. I doubt this is what the professor intended to impart.

I am not one to sympathise lightly. Yet I also hate the appendage of "or she" or "or he" or "or they" et.al. almost as much. "-person" is even worse. Do I have to spell it out for you?

angler instead of fisherman  
chair instead of chairman, chairwoman, chairperson  
firefighter instead of fireman  
speaker instead of spokesman, spokeswoman, spokesperson

Heaven forbid you should exercise a little creativity.

But the absolute worst thing someone can do is cut off another in mid-sentence. Professors - the teachers amongst us - should do all in their power to encourage speech. Even hateful speech

is what I was going to write, but I don't really believe that. I mean, I've recovered from bruises, cuts, scrapes and worse before I've recovered from some speech.

## the beast of s/he

---

Perhaps I should qualify. I would rather people sit across from one another at a table and yell and scream at each for three hours than kill each other with three bombs and missiles. I haven't recovered from death yet. Some ways of releasing hatred are less bad than others.

Yes, I am backtracking. I would rather backtrack than Commune with the Fears in Room 101 later. As far as my Hyde Park soapbox goes - - kindly accept this, my pre-emptive apology, that I did not mean to preach.

just a little "person" I am  
trying on different mantles of writing  
testing them for size  
seeing if they fit  
some pontifical, some honest  
some heartfelt, some thoughtful  
most of them scary

## R

---

there is a scarlet letter  
on my list of poems to write  
I don't want to write it  
I don't want to face it  
I don't want to mention its name

but it's in me  
yearning to get out  
yearning for the voice  
that only I can give it

I survive cloistered from it  
yet it haunts me  
yet it's common  
some it doesn't bother as much as others  
it bothers me much  
though I try not to let it  
I can't help it

I've heard that it can't happen to some  
but to those some, they die first  
sometimes I ask why I couldn't die first  
I've tried dying afterwards  
but that didn't work

yet some part of me dies by living  
it eats away like a cancer  
my hope is that my healing  
is eating away at it even faster  
I'm not the most hopeful person

I've asked myself about fighting back  
did I fight back enough  
how much fighting back is enough  
somehow saying no just isn't enough  
no matter what they say  
no matter what I say

## R

---

I know I shouldn't  
but I compare myself to others  
no ten stitches had I  
I was caught by surprise  
"no, please" pled I  
I somehow believed his lies

terrified, frozen in place, jarred, unreal, impossible, why  
[insert other of a thousand words here  
that peeled through my head]  
that to no action led

someone once told me that it was a defensive measure  
which separated my mind from my body at that instance  
concentrating my mind on my English major words of description  
trying to contemplate that which shouldn't be contemplated  
it didn't last long enough  
my mind was in my body when the guilt set in

at not foreseeing the unforeseen  
at not listening to someone who never said anything  
at not turning the corner that wasn't there  
at not fighting back enough

what if I had put on different shoes  
[insert a million other "what if"s here]  
I've asked them all  
what if that butterfly hadn't fluttered its wings in Africa

I'm not making much sense am I  
that's okay  
I never intended this ugly event  
to generate a beautiful poem

## R

---

trouble is, I did die back then  
how do you fix a shattered window  
I know it's part of who I am  
whoever that is  
I was always scared to look too hard  
in case I found out that I should have  
fought back harder

in a sense  
all my life has been a recovery  
I wonder when it will end  
or if

I'm sorry, I don't have a happy ending. In fact, I don't have an ending. Usually I can feel when a poem has ended. This one hasn't. But I don't want to write any more. And I wonder if it, if the voice, will ever be satisfied. For now, enough.

## Communion with the Fears

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### *Introduction*

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29491: Hey! There he is! Welcome Smith 53790! Come on in, make yourself at home.

53790: Greetings Smith 29491.

29491: Here's your workstation. Have a seat. I'll - -

53790: You don't use Newspeak?

29491: No. Didn't they brief you?

53790: Well, they said it was optional, but - -

29491: No, we don't use it. We find it best to be as familiar with the language of the rebels as possible and that means, unfortunately, we have to use the revolting inefficiencies of Oldspeak in the office setting.

53790: I see.

29491: As Interrogators, we have to be as close to the minds of our subjects as possible. And those minds use Oldspeak.

53790: Oh.

29491: But enough of theory. Have a seat.

53790: Thank you.

29491: I was glad the Ministry sent someone over so soon. Ever since Smith 23459 retired . . . Well, it's difficult to monitor all these Rooms 101 by myself. And I miss the conversation.

53790: How many do we have?

## Communion with the Fears

---

29491: Two hundred.

53790: Only 200? For the entire city?

29491: No, no, no. Just for this complex. There are five complexes; each has 200 rooms.

53790: Oh, that makes more sense.

29491: But we're the busiest.

53790: Why's that?

29491: We specialise in the creative personality disorders. You know, the artists and writers and so on.

53790: So that makes this complex the busiest?

29491: No, I meant that makes us, as Interrogators, the busiest.

53790: Oh, I see. Why?

29491: You know I was discussing this with Smith 23459 just before he retired. Most of the rebels require one-on-one treatment. They need a person to direct their attention to their Fear that is in Room 101. The CPDs can - - I'm sorry, I didn't want to throw too much jargon at you on your first day.

53790: No, that's okay.

29491: Well, it seems that the creative personality disorders can conjure up their own worst Fears without much assistance from a personal Interrogator. That's why we can conduct most of our Interrogations through a loud-speaker and these video monitors.

53790: Hmmm. I'm not sure I understand.

29491: Well, here. Take that girl for example. Oh, this will be good. She's my favourite. She's in here all the time. Her name is Novatia.

## Communion with the Fears

---

53790: She has a name?

29491: Yeah, that's another strange thing about CPDs - sorry, creative personal disorders. They always tend to use names.

53790: But in the real world, we're rapidly getting away from even using "Smith" and just referring to numbers.

29491: I know. Progress is amazing, isn't it?

53790: Yeah.

29491: Anyway if enlarge her screen - -

53790: Wait, won't the others mind if we concentrate on one and ignore the others?

29491: Oh, no. In fact, it's better that way. The more waiting that goes on in Room 101 for other prisoners, the more tortuous it is for them. That's another cushy part of this job. We can take a break whenever we want, because it actually helps soften up the subjects.

53790: Oh, smart.

29491: Yeah, it's great. Anyway, enlarge her cell - er, room. See how she cowers in a corner.

53790: Yeah.

29491: Now, I've known her long enough to know that she actually sees in the other corner a kind of dark mist or smoke-like substance that's roughly the shape of a person.

53790: Even though there's nothing there.

29491: Exactly. It's amazing. It's her creative personality disorder torturing her without us having to do anything.

53790: And anything we say through the microphone she thinks is the mist talking to her.

## Communion with the Fears

---

29491: You're getting the hang of it. In fact, I know her so well, to know that her idea of hell is to be - -

53790: Wait a minute. Wow. You mean - -

29491: I thought you'd be impressed.

53790: You mean religion?

29491: Yep.

53790: I've heard about that.

29491: That's why she's my favourite. It's like having an entire textbook of disorders lying open in front of you. It's great.

53790: That's amazing.

29491: You're actually stunned.

53790: I am, truly. I, I, I don't what to say.

29491: But here's the good part. Her idea of hell is to be left alone in a room all by herself.

53790: So we've created hell for her.

29491: Beyond that, within that hell we can create Fears.

53790: A hell within a hell.

29491: Yes. And her disorder also allows something else peculiar. She can actually feel alone in a crowded room. You're stunned.

53790: I am.

29491: That's why these people need our help. To get this stripped from their brains.

## Communion with the Fears

---

53790: So, let me get this straight. She believes in a hell which we can easily create by putting her alone in a room; but we don't even have to do that because she can feel alone in a room even when she's not alone in a room.

29491: It's great, isn't it.

53790: I bet Smith 23459 misses this job already.

29491: I bet he does too.

## Communion with the Fears

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**200**

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53790: Is her fear the same each time she comes in?

29491: No. Usually she comes in with a different one each time, but not always. We can ask.

53790: Wait. She doesn't talk on her own?

29491: Usually she needs some prompting at first. Then sometimes she starts speaking without much questioning. Oh, and I should say that when the microphone here is live, we both have to be quiet because she can hear everything in the room; it isn't filtered.

53790: Oh, that's good to know. She hears our voices separately then - I mean, as individuals.

29491: No. That's a good question, come to think of it. She hears - I'll have to think of him. Rats. It was on the tip of my tongue too.

53790: But she doesn't hear us.

29491: No. She hears our words though. Oh, Smith 15495. One of our best Interrogators. The system uses his voice.

53790: Oh, okay. And we can hear hers.

29491: Oh, yes. That's unfiltered in every respect. Shall we give it a try?

53790: Sure.

unmuted: Who am I?

Novatia: You're number 200.

53790: What does that mean?

29491: I don't know. It doesn't matter. It's her fear that's important.

53790: Shhh.

## Communion with the Fears

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Novatia: I went to bed early last night.

53790: I don't get it.

29491: Let her ramble, let her ramble.

Novatia: I thought about a poem about mirrors.

53790: Mirrors?

29491: It's a - -

Novatia: About how you can see yourself reflected in other people.

53790: Oh, I - -

29491: Just listen.

Novatia: Or maybe how it's just what you want to see. Or just the opposite. The faults you see in other people are often your own faults.

53790: Hmm.

Novatia: But you can see them more clearly reflected in other people.

29491: Quiet. She's not done.

Novatia: But the count was at 199 and I didn't want to be number 200. I didn't want to make the milestone.

53790: My gosh, she's crying.

29491: Brilliant, isn't it.

53790: And we didn't do anything. No torture or nothing.

## Communion with the Fears

---

29491: I know, it's great and watch this:

unmuted: Why.

Novatia: Because people will make such a - or might make a fuss about it. And then they'll see how it's not really 200 anyway. How some of them are just rubbish entries.

53790: One word, that's - -

Novatia: And how some of mine might qualify as rubbish.

29491: I smell an opportunity, let's watch ourselves. Just pay attention.

unmuted: And so what if they are rubbish?

Novatia: Then I shouldn't write. And people should be reading a better writer.

unmuted: Like who? Can you name some names?

Interrogation continues.

## alphabet soup

---

A, one or two at night, as needed, to help me sleep

B, half in the morning and take the other half at noon. I find it counter-acts a good three-quarters of the sedative effects of S.

C, one in the morning and one in the evening; it's a DAW which I have to write about sometime.

There's another C which I'm not going to talk about.

E, one to five daily, limited to two every hour, limited to three times every week, not to be taken on consecutive days, as needed, my front-line defence against pain

I, one to two daily, limited to five times per week, as needed, for pain. I actually limit it to twice every ten days. It is very important because it's an injection, thereby by-passing the digestive system entirely. Therefore it's the only thing I can take when I have an upset stomach. I don't want to build up a tolerance to it.

IN, one to three times daily, as needed, for pain. If E is my front-line defence, this is my rear-guard. If all else fails, I pull out the IN. This is because it mixes well with all other pain medications. For example, if E fails, I cannot take O (and vice versa), or if MA fails, I cannot take I (and vice versa); but I can always take IN.

K, one or two at night, as needed. This is to help with a nerve condition that effects my legs; this is also sedative.

L, one to three daily, as needed, but I usually take V because this really makes me tired; unless, of course, it's near evening, then I'll take it in the hopes of avoiding A and K

M, one in the morning, for general health, or so I'm told

MA, one to three daily, at least a half hour apart, limited to three times every week including I, limited to twelve times every thirty days, as needed, for pain. This is really cool. You put it on your tongue and it dissolves right into your tongue. It's wild. It's also about \$150 per pill, so it's rather expensive. It's the only pain medication I have that doesn't make me tired; so I reserve it for when I have to drive and I have pain. Fortunately (from a pain perspective) this doesn't happen very often.

O, one every twelve hours, as needed, for pain. I was basically prescribed this because I cannot take any over-the-counter pain medications. OTC pain medications run afoul of various other things I'm taking, so I was given this as a back-up. I don't use it very often. Only when things get really bad.

## alphabet soup

---

P, R & T, as needed, for upset stomach. I'm supposed to take all these with food. But telling a girl to eat is like, I don't know, handing out cigarettes at the local cancer society. S, one in the morning, one at noon and one in the evening. These are rather thick pills and I started off having to halve them which was kind of awkward. So I'm kind of thankful, really, that I'm taking a whole pill.

SM, one in the morning. To be honest, I'm not sure what it does off-hand, without looking at my notes. I think it's to help the absorption of my other medications into my system.

TO, two in the morning, one in the evening. Actually, it's not quite that simple. The milligram dose for the evening is four times that of the morning, but they didn't have a one-half milligram dose pill, only a quarter. So it's two small ones in the morning and one big one in the evening.

U, one every six hours, as needed, for pain. My final pain medication. Though, I'm trying to get away from it, but I think I have to keep it just in case. The problem is that most other pain medications are limited to a certain number of times I can take them per week, which means that if I hit a solid week or two of really hard times, I'll rapidly run out of options. This doesn't have a weekly limitation.

V, one every twelve hours, as needed, for a second nerve condition not related to K. It's not supposed to make me tired, but I also drink a lot of soda when I take it and I have to drive, just in case.

Z, honestly there is a Z. Actually, I've been telling people I'm off this one. I've even taken it off the official list I give my doctors. But I haven't actually flushed the last couple dozen either. It's almost like I need a secret. Strange.

Now this doesn't include the ointments, sprays, patches (no, not THAT patch) or drops, but I didn't really think those counted. Even though some are prescriptions.

## Communion with the Fears

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### *unfit*

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---

29491: Hi, greetings.

53790: I've got some good news for you.

29491: What.

53790: They've picked up Novatia again.

29491: Really? I didn't know they released her.

53790: Neither did I. They don't usually tell us?

29491: No, no. That decision is left up to others. Is the white Room clear?

53790: Yeah.

29491: Why don't you bring up the monitor. Oh, there she is already.

Novatia: Let me go.

29491: Talkative this time.

53790: Does she always go for the same corner?

Novatia: I'm sorry.

29491: Invariably.

Novatia: I know it didn't fit, but I thought it was okay.

53790: Is there another microphone on?

29491: No, no. She talks to herself sometimes.

## Communion with the Fears

---

Novatia: Just because there's not a tag for it, does that mean it's not acceptable?

29491: Just listen.

Novatia: I thought you said everything goes.

Novatia: I know it was just a list.

Novatia: I marked it short story because I had to mark it something. I didn't know what else to put. And it is a part of my story, a part of me, a part of the larger story of me.

Novatia: I didn't do it because I thought other people would be interested or not. I just - -

Novatia: Why? Because it was more factual than the previous piece I did, R, which was highly emotional and I needed a little break. But like most things, it just came as a flash through my mind and I decided to write about it. Like waking up in the morning and there was a flash about blue gum balls when I was a child or looking in the mirror when I was getting dressed one morning - -

Novatia: I know this is just a list, but there have been other lists in literature.

Novatia: Like what? I remember, I think it was Thoreau on Walden Pond who wrote down all his expenses - -

Novatia: No, I'm not comparing myself to his greatness. I'm just saying that there are other lists.

Novatia: Yes, I know that was part of a larger story making a larger point. What about all those lists in the Bible, the animals and genealogies.

Novatia: No, I don't think my work is divinely inspired either, that's not what I'm saying. I just don't know why I have to defend - -

Novatia: Well, I don't know what's interesting to other people and what isn't, I've told you that. I don't write that way. I mean, why did Blue Gum Balls get a favourite mark? Why would someone be interested in a little girl's antics. I don't know.

## Communion with the Fears

---

Novatia: Well maybe it didn't get a favourite mark, I don't know. But that's not the point. I write from within not from without.

Novatia: Of course it matters to me what people think. I would be devastated if someone said something that could even be remotely interpreted as negative. That's why I can't - -

Novatia: I don't shield myself from criticism by editing - - Look, I didn't want to write R in the first place. The last thing I want to do is to go back and re-read it just to make sure I didn't make any stupid mistakes.

Novatia: Okay, we'll leave poems like R out of the picture. The point is, at this time, I have to just put it down on paper, mistakes and all, and walk away from it. If I start to edit, I start to second guess myself and worry that - - I start asking myself the very questions that you're asking me now. I've deleted more poems than I've posted because of that. I find that I just have to come to the end of poem and upload it right away without looking back on it.

Novatia: Maybe it is amateurish, I don't know. But I didn't set out to win a prize. I mean words even at their best are inaccurate vehicles for emotions, right?

Novatia: I know they're always sad. I can't help it. It's just how I feel. Maybe I'm just going through a rough patch. I don't know.

Novatia: Maybe you're right. Maybe I should warn people about the darkness in the tags. But I think that you can find light within the darkness and tags can be misleading. I would rather just comment on structure and not prejudice, or pre-form the reader's expectation of the poem before they even begin to glance at it.

29491: This is our in.

unmuted: Readers like who? Can you name some names?

Interrogation continues.

to guy

---

I'll make no excuse for the delay  
but I still have to say  
thank you for bibli.ca

comment:

Dear Guy -

I'm not an expert on websites, but I didn't see anyplace else to post a "thank you". So I made one. It is well meant. Hope this is okay and not too weird. Thanks.

– Nova

## Communion with the Fears

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*writer*

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29491: Come in, come in.

53790: Novatia is here.

29491: Yes, yes, she's been here for a while. We didn't want to interrupt your medical exam. She got picked up last night. Sit down, sit down.

53790: She's crying.

29491: Yeah, that's great, isn't it? She's been like that for, oh, 9 minutes now. The record is 22. But I've got news.

53790: What?

29491: She just admitted, point blank, that she's a writer.

53790: Didn't we already know that?

29491: Yes, yes, of course. But to have her admit her illness is a first - at least in so frank of terms.

53790: You're excited.

29491: We've been working at her for a long time for this.

53790: Oh, look, she's coming out of it.

Novatia: But I'm still terrified at the comments, even though all in the past have been good.

## Communion with the Fears

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29491: Do you want to take this?

53790: May I? I'd be delighted. Thanks.

unmuted: What comments?

Novatia: The comments people make about what I write. I read a few. I don't know if I can continue. I still get scared.

unmuted: What are you afraid of?

Novatia: That I'm just repeating what other people have said but in a much more crass way. And that people will yell at me for it.

29491: And it just falls in your lap, doesn't it?

53790: Yeah.

unmuted: What other people? Can you name some names?

Interrogation continues.

## long lost

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I'm not talking about lovers or friends  
I'm basically referring to casual acquaintances  
or the general "man" whom you'll never see again

talk to them now before they're lost forever  
but I don't want to preach  
I just wish to express my regret  
at having missed my chance  
or, sometimes this feeling's worse,  
having had my chance and not seeing them again  
to see how they're doing

and why on earth do I remember some of these things

that new girl in the third pew up  
must have been a visitor because I never saw her again  
a longing through a typically boring sermon  
that she might become a surrogate sister  
a close, intimate confidante

I weaved my web of fantasy during the sermon  
maybe one day I'll tell you my fears of growing up  
Catholic in an Anglican country  
who says the queen couldn't be replaced by a Henry VIII  
(maybe that's why I loved the Queen Mum more)  
even the architecture told of priest-holes  
and the beheadings at the Tower

I wanted my "imaginary" confidante  
but we never did meet after the benediction

## my 11 Sp

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This is another mash-up I don't want to write. But this one's been gnawing at me. Ever since my last dream. Does anyone else have dreams about it? I worry about having PTSD. And still getting dreams about this and not other things. I don't understand.

Yuck. The trouble with not wanting to write about it is that my mind gets filled with other details and disclaimers. I better just plough on. We'll both see what comes out.

I had only been in this county - the US - for a short time. I had made a resolution of sorts to begin the new century in better weather. It took me until - maybe I should be vague on some details. I'll say November 5, 2000. My favourite holiday was Guy Fawkes Day. Mainly because of the poem. Remember, remember . . . But I digress. But only a little. The point is that coming from England - I still didn't get how far away some of the places are from each other over here. This is a much bigger country.

I was working at a TLA outside Atlanta at the time. That's another point which I know I have to be vague on. I must not, should not and/or won't say that I was employed at a Three Letter Agency or even if it had three letters. There were about ten of us in the office. We had direct telephone contact with other TLAs in the city, but had no radios or tellies in our office itself, so we were a bit isolated.

I forget the exact order of events.

Report of plane hitting the WTC. Coworker explained that previous bombing in basement had felt like a Cessna hitting the WTC to the people on the upper floors. Depends on size of plane.

The jump between accident and purposeful event is foggy, but bit by bit, rather rapidly, we learned of the second tower and that they were big airliners.

Report that one or both towers had fallen over. What does that mean, coworker asks: topple or collapse? We don't know. He thought they were designed to collapse in on themselves rather than topple. Realisation that skyline of New York is forever changed.

Report that headquarters or similarly-named building in Minnesota or Wisconsin evacuated.

I answered telephone. Wife of coworker. Do you what's going on out here?

## my 11 Sp

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Report that Pentagon had been hit. At least a military target someone said.

Report that State Department building in Washington DC had been hit.

Report that airliner went down in Pennsylvania. What's in Pennsylvania, someone asked. Perhaps it was on it's way to Chicago - lots of tall buildings there. Someone suggested the US Mint. Someone tried to quip that we could live without pennies. It crossed my mind that there was Independence Hall.

There was a general closing of some buildings and schools around the country. Some of us tried to carry on as best we could.

I was worried martial law would be declared.

But my biggest fear was that I didn't know when it would end. How many airliners did they have? Ten? 25? 100? Is it over yet?

I didn't cry that day, but I've cried since. I've mourned New York. I've cried because there was nothing else I could do. Though I was told not to be afraid, that I would only give in to the terrorists by doing so, I would be denying my own feelings by not being afraid. I was afraid. And I've changed my lifestyle to protect my heart. I avoid History Channel documentaries, radio interviews, older movies that might show the skyline as it once was. Am I giving in or taking care of myself and my dreams?

Sorry for writing. As I try to avoid things dealing with 9/11, I want you to be able to as well. But perhaps this is healing too. You're not alone if you bought a copy of the 9/11 Commission Report - and then had to throw it away a couple weeks later unread. Getting rid of its stare from the bookcase can be part of the healing process too.

## blue skies

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It was 13 Sp 2001. Actually, I don't remember the date exactly.

Coworker 1: Come on, follow me, I want to show you something.

Novatia, with a friendly, but suspicious tone: Okay.

Coworker 2: Where are we going?

Coworker 1: Come on.

He managed to find a way onto the roof of the building and we two females silly-ly followed him. He wasn't our boss exactly and had always been good natured.

"This is important," he said. And we knew he meant it. This wasn't one of his jokes. There was a kind of seriousness to him. "Look up. Look around," he said. "You will never see this again."

It was a perfect day. From East to West, North to South. Horizon to horizon. A crisp, clear blue sky. Not a cloud in the sky. A great vantage point. I had never known we could get up onto the roof before. But we were puzzled.

What are we looking at?

He said: there are no contrails.

## valuable idiots

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### Stream of Consciousness

Here's a stream of consciousness for you. (1) I was thinking this morning about TWiT. This Week in Technology - a podcast by Leo Laporte. In one episode he mentioned that (2) Bill Gates was rumoured to make an appearance on Doctor Who as an alien bent on taking over the world. (3) I then recalled that Stephen Hawking made an appearance on your American Star Trek once. (4) And then I thought how Stephen Hawking was big on black holes in space and then (5) how black holes are really fond of gravity, a lot of gravity. Compared to the "big" gravity of black holes, I then thought about the opposite (6) "small" gravity - or small quantities of gravity such as might be produced by a computer virus (thus completing the circle by getting back to TWiT.)

Does a computer virus have gravity? Might that not be a new way of detecting viruses? People who know me better know that I worry too much, thus I ask such queries. Perhaps this is completely off the wall, but at least it has the plus side of thinking outside the box.

### Thinking Outside the Box

And perhaps that's what you smart people need us idiots for. Thinking outside the box. Coming up with ideas that are bizarre. Or that get you to think of the problem in a different way. It has been said that a little knowledge is a dangerous thing - but I find it creative. That's another reason why I don't read anymore. I don't want my imagination limited by more concrete knowledge.

Perhaps my notion of a virus having gravity will help smart people with other problems. I strain my memory of physical sciences classes from my school days. And another reference from the TWiT podcast - they said that rootkits hide in your system and can't be found by virus scanners - the exact thing a worry-er needs to hear. So this stream: (1) maybe not gravity, but the related concept of (2) mass can be detected. (3) And  $f=ma$ , force is mass by acceleration - my teacher would be proud of me. (4) And don't we measure computer speed - so can't we measure resistance to that speed even if it is electrical resistance which would be produced by invisible rootkits? So, the more mass or stuff we have on a chip the slower it is? Oh, well. Again, the notion has the benefit of being outside the box.

Most outside the box notions can be dismissed. But how do we creative types get them to the proper thinking types? Is there a clearing house of ideas?

## valuable idiots

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### Pontification

The Good Lord also gave us idiots - and here I'm talking about the insane. And I emphasize the word "gift". They can give us insights into the Divine we might not otherwise have.

Okay, I'll take religion out of it. As a society we spend countless sums keeping the insane medicated or locked away in institutions. We might as well get something out of this resource.

Cops. Wildest Police Videos. My boyfriend is really into this stuff. What amazes me most is that y'all (you see, I'm trying to learn your corrupted US lingo) have a lot of guns. We don't have that in England. And I suppose at some point I have to stop thinking of myself as a resident of the UK. It has been over five years. Anyway. . .

There was this one clip of this guy jogging down the expressway, naked, in the rain, in the middle of the night, with a police car following him with a dash-camera on him, trying to convince him to come into the car. His response was, "Jesus told him to go to Florida". The narrator (and my boyfriend) immediately portrayed him as insane. There was no other consideration given to him. No other thought was paid to him. He was just placed in a neat little box labeled "insane" and filed away in their brains.

But I say, what else was he supposed to do? The US President, the ultimate authority in the country, like a god or Jesus (and the current president is religious) has said that, "we are addicted to oil". And addiction is bad. So, this bloke can't drive because driving uses gas, a by-product of oil. Clothes come, generally, from overseas - or at the very least are driven to the local supermarket by truck, which uses gas. He jogs, not walks, which is quicker. In the rain, nothing will stop him. On a highway, the most direct route compared to city streets. To Florida, a warmer climate which uses less heating oil than colder Northern States. And then you punish him for his loyal obedience to the President. Heaven forbid you should try to understand him.

Why do we immediately approach people we don't understand with scorn (you're insane!) instead of love and understanding. Ah, Nova, you just long for a utopia. A utopia where your time of being "forced" to watch a police video show will actually produce a poem or other writing which will produce a serendipitous effect on a thinker which will lead to something valuable. You are just trying to justify unproductive time. Trying to create value out of non-value. Everyone knows insane people (and those with creative personality disorders) should just be medicated, locked up and forgotten about.

## Re: 49709898456

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Comments Regarding: *Untitled #49809898456* by Josh Klinger

I looked at this and I thought it was brilliant. That's the first thing I have to say. But I also have to add the disclaimer that I'm not well read and not an expert. I also have to say that for personal reasons I didn't read the poem itself. Just the title and I glanced at the form.

As for the title - you picked my favourite number, by the way :- ) - I will say that years ago I saw the same thing applied to paintings. I don't know what gallery or anything, but some artist had simply labeled his/her paintings by number. I have also heard of some chap trying to change his name to a number. But I have never seen works of writing just labeled with a number - but I think it's a great idea.

I work differently. I see flashes of titles and then a poem forms around the title. So, I see the title first, the poem comes afterwards. But I have struggled with the notion that the title of a work can pre-dispose someone to the meaning of the poem. It can limit their understanding of the poem to that prescribed by the title. What you, Josh, have done is expose this falsehood. You have left the words of the poem stand on their own without the limiting effects which might otherwise be imposed on the words of the poem by the title. I think that's brilliant. I really like that idea - and I wish I could apply it, but, again, I work differently. I see titles in my head. Writing ten minutes later can produce a different poem. But the title is the same. Anyway.

The other comment is on the form. I like that too. You've put a poem in paragraph form. I have expressed complete thoughts in one word sentences in paragraph form before. Strange. And I have wondered about whether or not I should put transpose that paragraph into poem form.

I mean  
something like  
separating words  
into a kind of grouping  
separated  
line-by-line.

But I never considered what you have done, which is consciously breaking all the rules and specifically labeling a paragraph-form work of writing as a poem. I think that's marvelous.

Re: 49709898456

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So, Josh, what you have done for me is reminded me in a very vivid way that the title of a poem or other work of art might have no bearing on the body of the artwork itself and, indeed, can unfairly prejudice me about that work. That's something I have to keep in mind to help me keep an open mind. Hating people called "Lisa" is no reason to hate a picture called the Mona Lisa. Bad example.

The other iconoclastic thing you have done for me, Josh, is given me the freedom to write poetry in any form it happens to flow out of me - even if that is in paragraph form. Instead of concentrating on form and my old school teacher's condemnation of incomplete and one-word sentences, you have said, in 49709898456, that I should concentrate on getting the words out on the page. Essentially,

express the fire within -  
let the tags, titles and forms  
worry about themselves

Thank you, Josh.

Cheers,

- Nova

## maths

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I hate maths. Too detached from reality. Too fickle. Too unemotional. But I was able to rely on memorization to get me through algebra. Alas, it burned my brain so that now I can do not even basic maths without a calculator. But in my heyday I wrote this down in my notebook. I assume you know this trick already; but I'll risk boring you and repeat it.

|                          |                        |
|--------------------------|------------------------|
| Take                     | $a = b$                |
| multiply by $a$ to get   | $a^2 = ab$             |
| subtract $b^2$ to get    | $a^2 - b^2 = ab - b^2$ |
| factor to get            | $(a+b)(a-b) = b(a-b)$  |
| divide by $(a-b)$ to get | $(a+b) = b$            |
| or                       | $b = b+a$              |

which will give you the absurd:  $1=2$

And, consequently, the entire number system collapses.

This shows, however, that by using a completely logical system, you can achieve a result which calls into question the entire foundation of maths and the number system on which it is built. But instead of looking closer at the number system and asking why - and possibly creating a new system if this one is broken, which it is if it can be broken using logically sound procedures, people just ignore the problem by creating a rule to bypass the whole issue. Instead of trying to fix a broken number system, mathematicians have ignored the problem by creating a rule which will leave their number system intact. Take the easy way out. If a logical argument breaks something, create a rule which will make the logical argument seem invalid. Thus was created the rule: you can't divide by zero. Even though there is no algebraic rationale why division by zero cannot be done.

I'm not a maths person so I can't make a stronger argument. This is not my field of speciality (if I have one). But I became disillusioned (not that I was illusioned) by maths because of this. I thought briefly of creating my own system of mathematics based on the behavioural pattern of numbers in which it would be possible to divide by zero (in some cases, 2 can behave as though it is 1, since 2 contains all the information which 1 contains plus some, etc.) but, again, my efforts were limited by my limited knowledge in this area - and, perhaps, laziness.

## maths

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Actually, I lied. I was disillusioned way before I learned algebra. It came when I learned about the number 9. And I'm not sure why it was 9, but there it is. I took a Through the Looking Glass approach to maths, much to the dismay of my instructor, bless her heart. She had a hard time with me.

Novatia: If  $5+4=9$ , then why do you also say that  $4+5=9$ ?

Teacher: Order doesn't matter.

Actually, I'm not sure what argument my teacher used, but I'm sure she used several before it got through my head. I mean, saying, "I breathe when I sleep" is not the same as "I sleep when I breathe".

But after I understood that  $5+4=9$  AND that  $4+5=9$  then the instructor also said that  $6+3=9$ . That's useless. I wish she would make up her mind.

So, while maths isn't my strongest subject, I still view it with some fascination. Sort of like a fruit hanging from a limb which I can see but which I can't quite reach.

## fulminatory

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I have so much in me. I want to write a happy poem, but all I've got at the moment are rants and raves. Stuff to bore you with. Things inappropriate for here? I always doubt me. I wish I could let the rants go and not talk about them. I used to do that. Ignore injustice. Or file it away someplace.

NPR. Scott Simon. Morning Edition. I think it was a Saturday morning, recently. It was kind of sad. I had always thought of Scott as a thoughtful person with some good insights and commentary. But he just glanced at this in passing and laughed at it. Brazil. Pink coloured underground carriages for women only. Thus providing a safe place from backend pinching et.al. I think it's scary though. A slippery slope. Would Scott be so casual if a carriage were for Whites Only or Jews Only?

Someone called in a talk show so self-righteous. He had a Prius. Other people, "bad" people, drive Hummers. Those people aren't doing enough, according to the Prius driver. Is it absolutely necessary to, say, take a shower every day? Why not every other day - that's a way to save gas that would otherwise be used to heat water. We all have cause to be humble.

And I read somewhere that I could "pre-order Andy's book". Aaarrggghhh!!! I blame you Americans for the desecration of the language. The idea was that you could place an order for Andy's book before it was published. But this chap wanted people to buy Andy's book. I just don't get this time period of before ordering the book. I take out the credit card before ordering the book. I'm not making much sense - I just get flustered. I have such an appreciation for the language - I better get on to the next topic.

This is more like a blog entry, isn't it? Sorry. I tried watering the flowers yesterday. Another effort to postpone writing until I could get a "happy poem" in me so I could write about it. But it's not something I can force. I had to be careful with that. He doesn't want me to work around the house like that. Even if I do do it for enjoyment or other purposes. That's part of being "kept".

So, I worry that he'll see me. I worry a lot. Maybe that's why I'm sensitive about people criticising Hummer use. I want to be in something big, powerful, safe. Especially when the end comes. You ain't driving no Prius over no curbs.

## fulminatory

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I had a dream about the end - brought on by bird flu. 38% of the population died. Was that 38% of the essential part of the population - you know, essential services? Everyone is essential when it's someone who is close to you. And the question isn't, "can we survive with 38% of the population deceased?" - the question is more: can we survive for those five days when 65% of the population is totally incapacitated and in bed with a high fever and unable to do anything but stay in bed - we've all been terribly ill at some point like that, haven't we? And then feeling better and finding out that half of those who were sick didn't get better at all but died.

Then it occurred to me that there were two end of time scenarios. The technological world continues to drive on, without a driver at the controls, like a self-winding clock, continuing to tick away even though no one is around to read the time. Or the technological world will crash and burn - and nothing works anymore. I fear it's both. The GPS system will still be able to tell us our exact position anywhere on the planet, but we won't be able to call our neighbour on the cell phone.

But if I dream about it, I guess that means I worry too much about it. But I can get hurt if I don't follow the "kept" rules, if I don't meet his expectations. But his expectations change. Worry keeps me safe. Maybe a little.

Nova, no one is interested in your personal life. Go away.

## isn't

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it's what is there when there isn't  
what do you see in an empty room  
what do you hear when all is silent  
is  
the opposite thereof

what does it tell you  
what does it not tell you

I love to write but I haven't in a while  
does that tell you a mundane busy schedule  
or something more sinister  
and how can you tell  
when finally I write no more

more interesting perhaps  
will you read what I no longer write

## Comments Left

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### *Comment the First*

I've never really needed a reason to cry, but I do know that sometimes it's just the only rational thing to do. Just a random thought from one not unfamiliar with wet pillows.  
Warmest, Nova

### *Comment the Second*

comment in regard to poem beginning with: How long does it take for your life to end?

I try not to read things - personal problem - but whilst looking for something the first sentence caught my eye and my first thought was: your entire life. - Nova

## An Honourable Mention

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### *\*I\* Am Jesus Christ*

I am Jesus Christ.

A bold statement. I can prove it. You'll have to listen.

And I'm not crazy, though that is your first thought. I was hospitalised in my youth though. Attempted suicide. See, I'm not afraid of the truth. Who among us didn't think about death when we were teenagers.

These days my ills are more benign. I do have a shoulder injury. Well, less of an actual injury per se. Neck arthritis. Causes a continual spasm in one of the muscles of my shoulder. With a little nerve damage which causes tingling in my little finger of my right (dominate) hand.

All of this, of course, is a death sentence to a secretary (me). I'll have to apply for disability soon when the savings run out. I hate to go on government assistance.

Oh, and I forgot: the migraines. About one a week. Basically uncontrolled. I must take five pills for them alone. Yet so easy to forget to name when they are always a part of your life. Odd. It's difficult to hold down a job when you can't say for sure if you'll be headache-free that day, if you'll be functional that day.

And I suppose I should confess that I'm also a cutter. So maybe that's not so benign. I didn't completely shed the suicidal ways of my teenage youth. I usually try to wear clothes on top of the cuts. No swimsuits or short pants or short skirts for me. No drooping neckline. For the past three weeks though I haven't really been hiding it. I've put an "X" on the top of each hand. And you know what the oddest thing is.

No one has said anything.

No one.

Not even my spouse has asked if I was okay.

No one.

## An Honourable Mention

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Some I have noticed have noticed it. But they didn't say a word.

And I bet you wouldn't either.

You. Yes, you. What makes you any different? Would you keep walking if we passed in the hallway? Would you walk across a coffee shop for me? Would you even cross the street? No of course you wouldn't.

Oh, you'd have your excuses. She's probably getting help from somewhere else. Or I must have seen something wrong. Or Goth gone bad.

But I don't care about your excuses. I'm crying. You might think I'm just ordering coffee like anyone else, but that's just a show; I'm really crying.

Why won't you even walk across the coffee shop? Just to ask if I'm okay? Would you do it for Jesus Christ? Can't you see that I am Jesus Christ?

Verily I say unto you  
Inasmuch as ye did it not unto one of the least of these my brethren  
Ye did it not unto me



