

**WHAT WE BELIEVE
NOW THAT WE NO LONGER
BELIEVE WHAT WE FORMERLY
BELIEVED**

Prose Poems
By Matthew F. Amati

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cataphrastic are hoarbog realistically regurgitated.

Χορός
εὔφημον, ὦ τάλαινα, κοίμησον στόμα.

Κασάνδρα
Ἀγαμέμνονός σέ φημ' ἐπόψεσθαι μόρον.

Chorus
Hush, hush, poor woman, put those bitter lips to
sleep.

Cassandra
I tell you, you shall look on Agamemnon slain...

Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*

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BOOK I

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF ELDRIDGE
OAR

The Autobiography of Eldridge Oar

I was born in a ash can; my mother was a raven, my father was a jar of black grease. I wandered the flat parts of the world. I drove my cart and plough over the bones of the dead. I kept my paintbrushes in a can of Savienne coffee, my pistol in the rectum of a dwarf. I fell in love with a train wreck, but married a smear of blood on an asylum wall. My briefcase contained nothing but sea-foam. Often you could see me at the office pretending to murder and create. Every morning I caught the 5:15 swan to Tartarus. I lived in a tower on an island in a swamp next to a bog surrounded by desert at the foot of the mountains hard upon the sea. Every evening at seven the balloons would come. My sickness came upon me in the form of chattering bees. The room clouded around me; there were children singing in the cupola. I looked at the snorting water. The colors of the sky: orange, blue, crimson, gamboge, magenta, armchair, papoose, and viola. Plague. Here was no happiness. In the time I had before dissolution, I wrote ninety short novels, text reprinted here in full:

Aubade

The sun pushing its flesh through the lattice of the blinds. Awakening in your arms. Moving to the left, then moving to the right. Floor covered in cinnamon and shadows. Laughter from the boudoir. Two large eyes, teary, hazel. Moving to the right again.

The Hospital

You must resist these urges, Julie. Here is prescription for Zoxil and another for Unzoxil, to be taken when the side-effects of the Zoxil overwhelm you. The surgery is risky, but I'll use my most finely calibrated hoe. Now I will interrogate your liver. Please display your genitals to bored passersby. Of the spine. The nurse is going to crawl into your urethra; she is looking for something shiny, but she won't tell us what it is. Just lie there. Lie still. We don't want to have to restrain you. Of the knee. That's Dr. Haight, he likes to enter the operating theater through the sewers. How long have these urges been coming? The lab found a child's finger in your stool – we recommend fashioning children out of butter and eating those instead. This crank makes the bed bend in the middle, and you as well. Of the bowel. Can you describe these urges? Expose your vulva to the steel ceiling, please, Dr. Cream will be along presently to nuzzle it with his mustache. Of the islets of Langerhans. Go ahead and scream. That's it. Get it all out. We'll put more in, don't you worry.

A Species of Weevil We Had Not Seen Before

A species of weevil we had not seen before had infested the millet. The clouds that summer were a strange bunch, speaking a language we had not heard clouds speak before. "Where did those banditos hide the backhoe they made off with from Cullen's?" asked Clutter Joe, but the clouds only replied "Cavor efti mo?" That was the summer I spent in the company of Mazie Winterbottom, a preternaturally sad girl, who let me touch her breast under the pear trees, and then fled to the barn to cry quietly. Clutter and I mucked out the slough and fixed the fencing around the Holfern place, and all the while we didn't say a word to each other. That is really the best kind of language, the kind free of x's and o's, with only the occasional sigh for syntax.

Echoes

What would Vera have done with a gun when she mistook the blind woman for a ghost? I shall buy a trading vessel and go to sea. I will not stay with you. Bless thee from whirlwinds, star-blasting and taking. In her garden was a sundial, and I cannot think of sundials these long years since without wincing. Where are you rushing to, Propertius, speaking willy-nilly about Fate? Doing irritating things with our hands. The green of the Slalom cigarette pack. While under its storm-beaten breast/Cried out the hollows of the sea. I will come out to meet you as far as Bartlesville, OK.

The Forgetful Plumber

They are indeed filthy but they are still newspapers. You can read them to pass time. Don't mind the Chinaman. Scone? All the lights burned out, the floor covered in darkness, an ocelot in the freezer. Weeping amid the effluent light of the charnel-house. Here. What is it? Apple. Mmm, not bad. Thanks. Ashamed of his rash. Would not expose his genitals on account of the rash. Lived alone, that's what they'll say about Eldridge. Roach. Where? There. Indeed, roach. Pale light of the explosion. Dear God, in my sickness, I call on Thy mercy. Shite. Human voices in the rooms below. Scent like wildflowers when your face swims in front of me. Many Swedes are named that. Don't assume it's him. Factory whistles. Razors. Wreaths of columbine and clover. Bandages. Weeping in front of the Rembrandt. Sitting here on the floor with you, I want to say I love you.

Corridors

I am sitting at home. Everything is not right. There is blood in the bathtub. There is lots of blood. They are filming a documentary about pharmaceuticals. Gave the towels to General Washington. It is indeed my glass foreskin. I bought it at an auction. Talking to the orphans with object of sex in mind. Go home and wash; you smell like hare's croats. Like a cedar ornament. Like foxgloves.

Incident of the Small Person

It was a newspaper printed in Spanish, but it was never going to be understandable. Hair grows on the head. A new product debuted that made all other products look like variations on the desktop stapler. He met Death through an online dating service. The revenant corpse partook of the mustard. She was an adorable child, but her mother refused to give birth to her. The grill flared up and burned the other grill that was atop the first grill in the 'grilled' position. He certainly looked sinister in those goggles. The missionary position is rarely used by missionaries, who generally prefer to fuck each other from behind. Now I want to watch 'scrubs,' so the goldfish can go diddle a donut, capish? I think you should hand over the toaster now. Before someone gets killed. Past tense of the Assyrian gerund. Dinner at the Space Needle. A faux Cockney accent. The dog wanted a taste, but although it was understandable, it made us queasy. Man with monocle. Man with sores.

(Hint of Snausage in the pot-au-feu.)

Quis Talia Fando Temperet A Lacrimis?

I played cards in the stairwell of the abandoned palace. The flight of pigeons rattled in the clouds overhead. Who brought friesias to the clockmaker, the one whose knees ached as he crooned to his worm and his escapement? From the beet-cellar, a thud and a whistle. There is not much room in the garden for croquet or hopitty-boppity, there are too many alders overhanging the graves. Between the cracks in the scullery floor, some forgotten dust. A pair of tiny hands clasped the sill of the enormous French window, a pair of tiny knuckles whitened and was gone.

Back from the fields, the groundsman reported that the wells were frozen, the leaves black, the leopards vanished from the fens. In the Great Hall, the enormous stone head of Charlemagne, the one that in days gone by used to gurgle and tell jokes, has developed a transverse

crack between chin and septum. It is getting time to leave, perhaps for Paris or Belgrade or the shack where I hope my parents still live. I shall miss these superlative tinned radishes. Perhaps some traveler will blunder in here someday, but she will not know what to make of the scattered underthings, the dented teakettle, the chalkboard marked with recipes for a funeral and *pain au chocolat*.

The Light in the Hills

A serf made himself a wife out of cow skeletons, but she was unable to weave or look after the pigs. Owls laughed in the forest, but she would discuss only Sunday school and chess. They owned a clock which clattered on the mantle. The clock was mad, its gears were chipped, and when the cuckoo emerged, it recited prophecies of fire and the poetry of Rod McKuen. The well needed mucking out, the fields grew over with thistledown and yarrow, yet the serf and his cow-bone bride would not leave their porch. He rocks there, crooning. From the nearby river-valley they can hear chanting and a fever of drums.

Shooting at Leprechauns

The lawn strewn with faded furniture. Frog missiles still coming, eh? I looked for them in out-of-the-way places. They looked for me in the great public squares. Pardon me while I see our Jewish friend off. Then and only then add the salt. One for the wife. And for the astronaut. She walked away, but then she thought about it and came back again. Haunted by memories of the ride with Zapata. The incorrect thinkers screamed from the wrong side of the bricked-up wall. Dreams that you dream at home. Dreams that you dream in mosques. Dreams that you dream in True-Value.

A Moral

A whale once fell in love with an ice cube. The whale proposed. The ice cube saw the union as convenient and acceptable. Alas, the ice cube was really looking for a sardine, the whale for the icy Southern continent. So it happens when Time is mismeasured, when the hot fuse in the blood reaches its end. You can find them with a little searching, in a suburb of Tallahassee, behind green doors that never open. It's strange that sometimes you cry when you are laughing.

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BOOK II

THE BIBLE READ BY JULIE OAR

Julie and her Children

This was Julie Oar. Pale straw mashed atop her head. Eyes pendulous with tears. Sitting on the starry stump with a book. Eager children dying of cancer, hanging on her every word. Speak German, Juliebob, they exclaimed, merry eyes bright.

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Julie's Mission

Julie Oar has a mission. It is a mission from God, she said . The best kind of mission.

Her Bible

Julie's Bible has a green cover. There are bits of skin marking favorite pages. I take it in the bathroom.

Lecture

Julie reads:

In The Beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. God was pleased. They were good heavens and a pretty good Earth. Blue, with white and green highlights. Not leaking blood like the old one. God said Fiat Lux. What? Light. Oh. God fashioned a bathtub with feet and a scaly finish. You can bathe in that, said God.

Adam and Eve

Adam and Eve were alone in the Garden and naked. Eve: I am perfectly content in this Garden. Fruit, bees, serpents, turntables, wrought-iron, grass, flowers, a Volvo. Adam's wangaboo flapping about. I am neither ungulate nor gravid, a snow-pea with glands.

The Angel at the Tree

Light, from an angel with fifty swords. You could see angels quite often in those days. They frequented the grape arbor and the better bars.

Geographies of Gardens

Adam and Eve were alone in the Garden and
naked. Adam: Gin. Bananas. Sculpy. Cut glass. In
the center of the Garden, the asylum for the blind.

The Naming

Adam and Eve were alone in the Garden and naked. Adam named the animals. Thou Philco. Thou Waxwand. Thou Warhol. Thou Cronkite. Thou Lesser Cronkite. Thou Drano. Thou Spork. Thou Mastodon. Thou Equus. Thou Fleer.

The Serpent

In the center of the Garden, the asylum for the blind. High stone wall with glass spikes. Plaster girandoles paling in the moonlight. In a steel-walled room, the Serpent. Covers his eyes, rocks back and forth. Weeping. Nurse brings him his Thorazine. Do not want Thorazine. Must have Thorazine. For burn out your nervous system. You don't want to grow old without the shakes, do you? The Serpent has more than the usual complement of penises, he uses these to rap out his manifesto of hate on the paneled atelier.

Caveat

God to Adam: Of all the trees in the Garden may thou eat. If you are really inclined to eat trees. My only quimquam is this: Do not ride your bicycle on the gravel path leading to the abattoir. Your hunger is for lentils, your appetite for foie gras trifle keenly whetted. Ejaculate on Eve's belly for the time being, we do not have sufficient textile capacity to clothe a breed of little anencephalics.

Neighbors

Eve has been playing mumblety-peg with the Hottentots in the next garden over. This is a violation. Exchanging information about their respective gardens is also a violation. Eve tells them that Eden has a trapdoor leading to a pool of tears. Cannibal Lilith tells Eve that Narnia has a carpeted detonation-chamber.

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Trouble in Paradise

Adam is watching Battlestar Galactica. God is calling: Adam, where art thou?

Adam's Puppet

Adam has a hand-puppet. The puppet's name is Cain. Would you like to see a show at 5:00 in the arboretum? Grand guignol. Admission 5 dinars. Subject: Death of the Hanged Man. Will serve scrod boil. Don't bring firecrackers.

Saturday

The rain is falling. The Serpent foresees the end of everything good, and blessed and worthy of human love. There will be a girl, a radiant and talented dancer, fiercely intelligent, a heart kind through and through. She will be despoiled by soldiers and left face-down in a creek. For this the Serpent weeps. There will be a library where the screams of children are archived for the edification of masochists. It will be buried under the excreta of a mobile volcano. For this the Serpent weeps. There will be scholars, searching after the graves of poets. For this, the Serpent folds his hands and watches the unceasing rain.

The Rain

The rain is turning the Garden to mud. Small translucent efts are skithering in the canals.

A Conversation

Serpent to Eve: Thou slick hole. Thou receptacle. Thou dickmilking chattel. Pick up the axe, rage through the hydrangeas, cover the petals of the white rose in blood. Be not a pod. Be fire, be rage, be the white liquor that dissolves stone. Hide from the child that through his life he may seek thee. Pour your libations on the barren ground behind granaries. The king will die and be consumed, it shall be through your sacrament that the womb of the soil puts forth eyeteeth and cysts. Raise your face to the sky that in secret loves thee. Beware, once you have done this thing, that your womb will rage against thee and betray thee, of the life that will devour thee from within, of the decay that will eat thee -- even as thou climbest the hill you will sleep beneath. The singing beneath the hill is yours, not Adam's, this will be your reward. You will be safe around mangoes, staplers, Chevies. Beware anvils. Adam will be safe near grouse, hammers, ashtrays. Tell him you know what he should beware of, but you won't tell him just yet. There is a word I shall whisper unto thee; never shall you or your descendants whisper this word unto the sons of men.

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The Word

The serpent whispers the word. Word indistinct: it appears to have three syllables.

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BOOK III

WHAT WE BELIEVE NOW THAT WE NO
LONGER BELIEVE WHAT WE FORMERLY
BELIEVED

Faith vs. Science

Faith can move mountains, although all the mountains are still in more or less the same place they were before there were any faithful people. Science can synthesize peanut oil from the surface of the sun! Faith can answer the Big Questions about death, life and destiny. The answer has something to do with wool. Science can explain how bananas evolved from pterodactyls. Faith can explain the fossil record -- Nimrod led the Phithithites into Canaan and there were all these golden idols and harlots and what-not and it's bad to say to the wood 'Awake!' and, well, it's kind of like that. Science is a hooded thief ringing brass bells. Faith is a pail left in the desert in which sits a note that says 'BUY WORMS.' The oldest trees have forgotten the inventors of the saw, while crooked flowers nod over their graves.

The Investigation

What the press corps wants to know is: does the President have a swivel chair, and does he swivel in it? How often does he swivel? Is there swiveling going on during cabinet meetings? During Greenwich Mean Time? During an oxygen bomb attack? What does the Vice President think of this? Has he his own swivel chair? It wouldn't be fair if he didn't.

Outside the weather is driven sleet and cold. The citizens are growing beards and caterwauling.

Denver, 1959

The dead were at it again. Slobbering in the Godiva sample platters, ruining the plumbing with gobbets of skin. Julie and I stood in front of Millet's Angelus. It makes me sad to be human, she said. I kissed her passionately on the neck, but she pulled away. I stood watching her for a second, her eyes fixed on a point in space. Then I turned and walked quickly out of the museum, taking a left down Eighth Avenue under the lightless sky. I never saw her after that.. In a cold-water flat on the North Side, I crouched on the side of the bed and grasped my feet. My breath came in short gasps. Someone was throwing slabs of meat at car windshields. I could hear the sound of a jury being fed to the cats. I kept thinking of the broken 'cello. The smell of fish being cooked. Suicide. I regarded the eggbeater on the nightstand coldly. One's guts, tortured and whipped until stiff peaks formed. This night shall

thy soul be required of thee. Drains. The gritty snow was falling again. Sirens wailing warning the populace to crouch under Metro awnings or in their homes. Is man born for no more than this, to end up forty and naked with yellowing skin and a heart full of ashes? Jars. Milk. The poems of Wallace Stevens. The poems of Mildred Gilhooly Clark. The poems of both combined, an elegant good-bye note.

Hard Objects

Julie misses her mother. Her fish. Hair has begun to sprout along her forearm. On her eye. She has got a small stone lodged between her left toe and her cerebrum. Screams of orphans in the night. Toads. Upset by television. Broken glass in culvert. Man in culvert. Carson City. Loss of favorite mug. Teddy bear. Virginity. Cloud of helpful smoke. The Moon. Bones sing from the graveyard. Potted plant with unpleasant tendril. Familiar faces. Streaks of sunlight through cracks in root cellar. Child with burned face. Child with viola. Oozing egg yolk. Ad for headache medicine (the one with the creepy grandmother.) Helpless, and the well is very deep...

The Procedure

The city had recently undergone a procedure known as bombing. Bombing had made life gay again for some residents, particularly bankers, but less so for pickpockets and shepherds. Life continued after a fashion, as did death and writer's block. Although the city walls yet stood, the domes of bald heads could from time to time be seen bobbing furtively behind them.

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The Ruined City

Autumn on the streets of the ruined city. Faces of
passersby like blastulas, like murdered architects,
like Spain

The Author

We met the author. He didn't seem to fit his virile persona. But he signed our howler monkey for us, and afterwards it killed a child in fury.

In the Distance

A milkman's grave. My turn at Parcheesi. A parasitology exam. Dinner. The last stop sign. The church on Cumberland road. The Kost-Mart. The opportunity to play trombone for a living. My cousins in intelligence. The point of no rerun. My moment in the sun.

The Duck Fashioned of Cocoa

Time for lemons again. Here comes the Inquisitor.
Tore off the bandage, but the wound had not
healed a bit. Grass too tall to have any hope of
finding him.

Ann Boleyn

The ferrets need their sperms counts maintained, but I'm through. I am tired of being chained to your business. I can feel something sticky between these sofa-cushions. Don't you ever clean between the sofa cushions? Life used to hold more promise than my being the feeder of your whisker farm, the mixer of your Tom Collinses, the nightly tender of your flaccid John Thomas. Our children sold for bones, our bank account full of quail eggs, our love nest woven of nails and burning tar.

King Henry

Have done with you: I am going to the pharmacist's
to feel my testicles roll around again.

The Last Human

The last human being alive is tired of pornography. He has driven all the abandoned Bentleys and Lamborghinis that he can stand down the empty freeways. He has broken into the houses of his favorite actresses and played with their underthings, he has eaten expensive dried truffles and smashed great works of art for fun. He awakes every morning on expensive silk sheets surrounded by marble and glowing wood and sunlight and fantastic luxury, but none of it is his; he is a squatter in an abandoned dream. Beasts of every kind throng the streets. With no-one to hunt them, run them over or build houses over their burrows, they multiply and prosper. The last human being leans out his penthouse window to see a grand procession of beavers, dogs, cheetahs, pythons,

woodchucks and raccoons racing up Lake Shore Drive. The animals no longer prey on each other, there is enough human refuse to feed them all for centuries. They have been interbreeding in the wilderness; the unholy new combinations of rabbit and lion, parakeet and boar, giraffe and axolotl stride about like the new owners of the planet. The last human being can stand it no more, he leaves the rotting cities and spends his last months wild and free, riding cowroaches through distant hills.

Autumn

When your hangman is Beauty, the comet that will deliver you is a long way off. When your hangman is Self, no wind may stir the leaves -- but taste, if you will, the smoke of a nearby auto-da-fe. When, only minutes past, the ghosts have advanced under shadows of approaching night, I shall find you, sad statue in an alcove in a sealed tomb-hall, and taunt you with kites and flowers.

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BOOK IV

A HISTORY OF US WRITTEN BY OUR
AUTOMOBILES

How to Think About Them

There are several possible ways to think about automobiles, ranging from the obvious to the unsettling. ‘Self-moving’ is what the word means: a hybrid of Greek and Latin tongues that never conceived such a thing. It has long been the dream of mankind to be ‘self-moving.’

A Toy

An automobile is a toy. It gleams, it makes noise, one wishes to own one. Often one wishes to own several where one would suffice.

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The Beautiful Ones

The most beautiful automobiles: the Ford Thunderbird, the Bugatti, the GTO, the Lancia, the Marie Celeste, the Titania, the Vulva, the Wisp.

Convenience

An automobile is a great convenience. (Can I getta ride?) Also a goddamned nuisance. (Fucking snow tires.) There are contradictions in owning an automobile.

How A Car Works

An automobile is made of thousands of parts. The significant parts are: the alternator, the gear-box, the differential, the grindle, the axle, the frottage handle, the cylinder, the burpgun, the seats, the wiper-coordination-drum, the tocsin, the thromdimbulator, the rectum, the meat-fork, the hubcap and the other hubcaps. Should any one of these parts malfuction, an explosion will take place.

The Garment

An automobile is a suit one puts on. One slips one's arms through the doors, one slides one's feet under the dash, one fastens the doors shut. One belts oneself in. Our barbarous and metal little costume, our all-weather wheelsuit. In it, we are sexy yet sexless, we express ourselves yet we are utterly anonymous. We are powerful, yet we just might perish and take a few goddamned pedestrians/mailmen/raccoons/schoolkids with us.

How To Save Money

Most economical automobiles: the Ford Fairlane, the Corolla, the Packard, the VW, the Trabant, the Stanley Steamer, the Sherman, the Millennium Falcon, the Wells Fargo Wagon, the Mule.

The Dark Rumor

Early automobiles resembled the horse-and-buggy, until that point the most common form of land transport. Recent automobiles resemble cryogenic coffins. Speculation: a voyage is being planned on our behalf by shadowy travel agents.

Reynolds

My fiancée, said Reynolds, prefers sitting in the car to sitting in the house. The seats lean back, plus she can smoke there.

Fun Nature Facts

An automobile is a creature with a human being living in its gut, in a kind of symbiosis. Who is in charge of whom? The latest technology has the car telling the driver to turn left or right. The new masters of the planet have one broad eye, they breathe smoke and their entire vocabulary is a series of honks. When one dies, its parasites outlive it (usually) and go forth to find another host. Preferably one with air and a CD player.

The Biggest

Burliest automobiles: the Studebaker, the Ram, the Blazer, the Humvee, the Masticator, the Cleaver, the Hate.

The Usurper

We were auto-mobile before this interloper showed its grill among us. Since it has taken our streets and towns, we have become sedentary. It goes.

Ire

I am going to the drugstore. You are going to school. I'll be going now. Go go go said the T-bird; humankind cannot. Selah.

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BOOK V

A VISION OF THE FUTURE

Your Ghost Speaks

Not your bones, but the bones of someone someone you knew knew turn up in a garden. The alphabet in which your perception swam like a minnow in the sea now turns up on the odd artifact, under a rock, a jumble of strange lines, curves and whorls dropping a nonsense syllable here and there to the world of the deaf. How many beer cans did you throw in the trash? Not your beer can, but some nameless one out of billions is in a private collection in the northern hemisphere; there is another, less well-preserved, in the southern hemisphere. Some words -- insect, cloudburst, boring -- survive, but they are hardly recognizable in the new languages. Something crucial depends on the word 'fletz' but you cannot know what it is.

Ad for a New Earth

Now have perfectly square continents! Seas a uniform six feet deep, with shallow end of two feet for the little ones. Deserts with Diet Pepsi fountains every twenty feet and restroom facilities. Beast in Jungle behind safety-glass for viewing purposes. Hermit on mountain to give hermit tours. Fire burn at a safe 88 degrees. Water breathable. Cliff come with iron safety rail. We are give you prophet for enlightenment, beware the wilderness behind his eyes.

Mother

Mother is everywhere. Even when you are quite far away from her, your walls might as well be her steel walls, your boots could be her spiked slippers, your bloodied tongue her gossamer dream on an Autumn afternoon.

The Workers in the Plant

They told us the barrels would not leak, nor the fumes dissolve. That the burning would feel like silken hands, like moths. O, that I were clad in silver and catapulted away, that the fire might not burn me nor the seas drown.

Your Replacement Brain

The batteries are guaranteed for at least a decade. Or a week, depending on your subscription status. It has the latest in Thought-filters. No more stray ideas, wool-gathering or nonsense. The nightmares are a glitch that we are aware of and we are working on. Try saying the word 'wood.' Try it! See! Now try 'motherfuckers.' Oops, you won't try that again! The help line is accessible via telepathy. If your telepathy is not working, try shouting into a barrel. The twitching will clear up. The drooling we are not sure about. One end of this cord plugs into Mother. The other into you. We made it extra long so you can reach the barred window that looks out on the garden. When evening falls you feel a pang of sorrow and the tears come. We will fix that in the upgrade, even if it hurts.

The Detective's Lament

Business is lousy. I'll have to give it up and go back to the Plant. A shame after all the trouble and bribes to get a Detectiving license and an office. Light like broken fingers through the blinds. Dead cat on the stair this morning. Tasty? Mother died again last night. I'll have to go see her and offer support. Two bullets left. Enough for a case? Worth it to petition Control for another set of six? Not if things don't pick up. Fresh water tap leaks. Using up my ration. Coffee with salt water not taste right. Office smells of wet socks and cabbage.

The Rumor

Somewhere there is a band of rebels. They live on snakes and sing songs of pomegranates and dust. They shelter in the rusting hulk of a gas chamber. Their leader is named Jennifer, she has a missing breast and a voice like sparrows. They need more guns. Mother cannot stop them. Mother could stop them, but lets them be. Mother has already gathered them in, and they are now nothing but echoes. They never existed, but we dream them up as the shadows come.

The New Language

The new language is most convenient. There is only one word: grey. It is a noun, a verb and an adjective. (Adverbs are unnecessary, we do everything the same way all the time.) I am grey. I see grey. Your hair is greying. The new grey is greyer than the old grey. Grey was the sea, grey were her eyes, grey was the new ministry, a mountain of hate and relief.

This new word 'grey' serves our purpose well, but we are thinking of lopping the G and the Y from the ends, and eviscerating the 're'. Yes, this word is much improved. Speak it all you want.

Why Not Join the Army?

We will give you the skills to break rocks. With your perineum. Your Class-A Uniform has a badge that says 'Inspected by No. 3.' Your feet will learn to move in time with other, smarter feet. Your bayonet will be clean and sharp, rated factor seven against infant flesh. In the motor pool is a talking egg. It will forecast your behavior and that of your intestines, should the two of you become separated. Your regiment will go on a practice march through the swamp. Then they will have a practice return. Sergeant Boyle lost his testicles to a witch, but he found them again, on the Black Market in Da Nang. They say the Colonel's a mean 'un. They say the generals are spools of tape on a forgotten cryptograph generator. I am Army Strong, I am Few, I am Proud, I am Mother's Fist, a black drop in an ocean of oily smoke.

Snacks

Choco-pods! Cheez-blops! Salmon floss wads!
Lymph Snax! May contain unacceptable traces of
iridium-345! May contain eyes! Great-tasting lime
strands! Froot Wartz! Thorax Bytes! FD&C Grey
No. 7! It's Pancrealicious! Made entirely from
byproduct byproducts! Pork Scars! Chicken
Stringers! Comes in three delicious flavors: vanilla,
beef, and pomegranate! Curd-Cookies! Tumor
Rinds! Try new Lard-mon-ade, in three cool
flavors: bacon, banana, and soap! Cheddar blisters!
Corn floaters! Hungry Man Entire Brain Dinner!
Nut-Glogs! Cloaca-Roos! Mmm-mmm! Caramel-
Chili-Chicken Goodness! Butter-Mung! Apple
Grunts! Gristle-Dingers! I Can't Believe It's Not
Glycerol Ester Of Wood Rosin! Chew carefully:
may contain unground bits of hoof. Find the egg-
sac in specially unmarked boxes! Lean Cuisine
Mediterranean Leftover Bucket! McSkintags! New
Crystal Light Barium Intestinal X-ray Gulp! I'm
lovin it!

The Sailor's Life

I should get a job on a submarine. Down into the toxic jello of the seas, through fascinating layers of diapers, corpses, acid clouds. rusted drums. One thing you won't see through the milky windows is a fish. Subs are made of nonreactive-plastic-coated foot-thick steel, but sometimes they leak anyway because the Bolivians make them. A fascinating death is death aboard a submarine. Eaten away to your bones. Requiescas in pace with the other bones and the floating sacks of god-knows-what. I cut my thumb but I do not bleed.

When the Aliens Landed

When the aliens landed, we quickly found out two things about them; they were completely boring and they wouldn't *leave*. 'Is this what you earth people call 'Television?' they would say before plopping down in front of Nick At Nite's Green Acres marathon and cranking the volume. "Is this what you earthlings call a 'bag of chips?' What about this 'diet pepsi' we have heard so much about? Perchance might there be some stored in your refrigeration device?" The one called Zorxxx-489 came in from the backyard. "I was curious about your earth mating rituals," he intoned, handing me what remained of the cat. Their ray guns were feeble, their powers of telekinesis were about strong enough to knock over a styrofoam cup from a short distance, but their ability to find your credit card and max it out purchasing every doorknob assembly in Menards' inventory was nothing short of awesome. Clearly, they had to go. Viruses had no effect on them (sorry HG Wells) bullets went through them with no apparent

deleterious effect, and if you set one on fire, he merely melted into a silvery substance that would never come out of your sofa cushions. We then approached their spacecraft, lined up by the hundreds in the deserts of New Mexico. "They must come from a heck of a planet, to have developed space flight," said Ted. "What kind of planet has such a desperate need of doorknobs?" Lisa countered. We got one of the saucers started and flew it back to Xcukhqrrrh, their home planet. Stunned, we surveyed the surface of their world, a vast desert, crowded as far as the horizon with freestanding, knobless doors...

More From Your Ghost

In the middle of a featureless plain juts a tall cream-colored cylinder. An individual with tufts of hair on his nose and forehead is scratching symbols in a tight spiral around the girth of this cylinder. Somehow these symbols relate to the world and time you lived in, but it is only this lone individual who carves them, and only here, in this desert. No-one is around to see him, but still he goes on scratching, filling up his available space with incorrect suppositions.

What We Believe Now That We No Longer Believe What We Formerly Believed

BOOK VI
THE BEARDED FARMER

The Situation

The Bearded Farmer and the Hill Wife have been happy enough at their little mountain farm for the past eleven years.

His Beard

In the early days, his beard was short, dapper. Someone who knew about beard fashions would have called it a Van Dyke. The Hill Wife was slender and sparkle-eyed. She liked the Van Dyke, it reminded her of the small city in which she had grown up, with its cafes and trams. The Van Dyke Beard, however, was no substitute for Turkish coffee and conversations about books -- in fact, she realized what she had given up when she moved to the mountain farm and the Bearded Farmer's beard grew out.

The Realization

Now that the beard is brambly and owl-infested,
like the upside-down mane of a lion, she sees
nothing in it of sophisticated life she had dreamed
of as a girl -- she sees only the wild briars of the
hillside and the boulders and mourning geese.

Wandering

The Hill Wife has been wandering farther and farther from the farmhouse of late. Her mouth is downturned, her eyes are dull. Away from the farm she finds the same wilderness repeated over and over -- tree, rock, beehive.

Her Agony

She cannot stand to be near the house. To enter it - to feel the close damp of the kitchen, the sleeping-body smell of the bedroom - is nearly unthinkable. To embrace the Bearded Farmer, with his sighing forest of a beard, his keening sea of a beard - she puts the thought out of her mind. Even this close to the house, a voice floats up from the well, a voice repeating the word "cauliflower" and sometimes the word "blindness." At this, her heart curls up inside her and she only wishes to be gone.

The Departure

The Bearded Farmer is calling for her. He only wants a fried egg and a kiss. Where she has gone he does not know and will never understand.

What We Believe Now That We No Longer Believe What We Formerly Believed

BOOK VII
A FAIRY TALE

Directions to the Room of Pendulums

Listen closely. Through a keyhole in the granite doorway you may smell the sea. A staircase of colored smoke will bear you to the room where we keep the pendulums. Make sure you know the plurals of various words for 'dust.' Hone those conversation skills! Your new avatar speaks Greek, Catalan, Sanskrit, Wolof, Algonquin and Silence.

Once Upon a Time

Hush! I will tell you a tale about a princess! Wan was she, and given to sighing at her casement. Her days were spent in rose-maddening, her nights in vaginomancy.

What We Believe Now That We No Longer Believe What We Formerly Believed

The Villain!

An evil duke desired the princess. He set sail for her country in a painted ship.

The Ship

The ship's name is the *Texarkana*. She is a seventeen-masted spooner with a flying giblet. She handles well, except for her tendency to break in half, explode, disappear down the gullets of whales or burst into tears. On starlit nights, we hear her singing sad chanteys about eyeless daughters, unwound watches, contact lenses lost at sea. We really wish she would stop.

The Crow's Nest

The crow's-nest sits high, high, high above the deck. The Watcher in the crow's nest untangles starlight from his copious eyebrow-hair. The Watcher ascended so so so many years ago and we have not heard from him since. We are certain he is there, mouthing inaudible warnings about storms to come in our grandchildren's time.

All Aboard

The sea full of blood, the hold full of blood, and all the casks in the foredeck leaking crimson...it was thus we began to wonder about the identity of our two pirate captains.

The Voyage

Listen! In the hold of the ship, a sailor has brought along a harlot he met in Singapore. It is dark under the burtons, and darker yet under the black stars of this unholy hemisphere through which we must sail.

The Land of the Earless

We ventured off-course, much too far North. An army of angry Statues of Liberty pursued us through a bay of orange foam, burly green Athenas waving their axes like Valkyries.

The Naval Code

Disobeying the Captain will get you a flogging. Failing to spear mermaids with your soup-spoon will merit you a flogging. Cannibalism on any day except during Lent, a flogging. Linger on the island of ambulatory clitorises for purposes other than researching *The Origin of Species* will put you in danger of the brig. Drinking seawater will turn you into a cormorant with human eyes. Don't molest the skeletons who are swabbing the deck; they can flash lightning out of their empty jaws.

The Duke's Arrival Looms

The wan princess hears something different in the moaning of the sea. She knows the duke is coming. She leans out her tower window and begins to grow out her luxuriant golden pubic hair. Children in the rude town below feel it brush their heads in the breeze. They tell their mothers that the wind tickles their ears. Their mothers tell them faeries are looking after them. One mother shivers and burns the roast.

The Destination

On the horizon, we see the spires of our port of call. There are drinks to be had there, and colorful beads to buy, and sultry concubines who smell like polecats. These concubines move in sinister geometries. They enfold, they dilate. I remember when I was young and dying of the grippe, a certain dream would come wrapped in velour. The breath of one such concubine transports me forward in time to the day after my death. It is a good day, as I get to be a cowboy, something I've always wanted. Hooray, let's go!