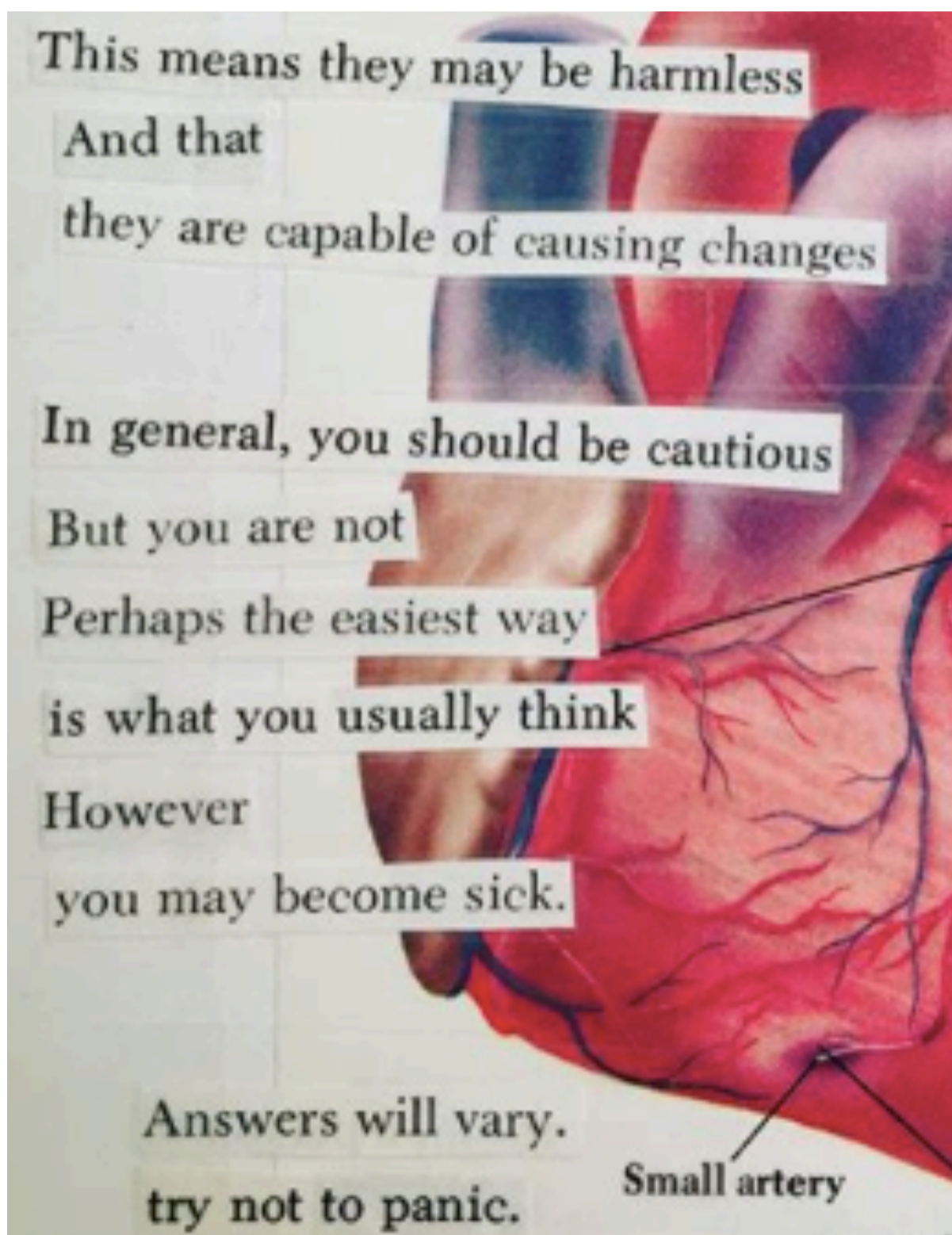


an unfinished novel

THE WEIGHT OF WORDS

GUNITA GUPTA



A note

ON THE TEXT

My writing began as a piece about dictionaries. I was interested in the authority we place in a textual source without contemplating its authorship. A dictionary is one analog example of this. I was specifically interested in physical textual objects and how old books—at least to me—bear the weight of containing something profound. The piece entitled, *References*, was originally Chapter 1.

The story evolved—as these things do—to become a contemplation of knowledge and where it comes from, truth and what it means to speak or write it, and the power we give to language as the mediator between beings.

I have not named any characters, specifically because I am still unwilling (or unable) to create a character to that extent. There is another chapter/novel here, I am sure! To name a character would be assigning to it a life with a past and a history attached to a name. This is what I believe and I am unable to do it just yet. I want my characters to be *every-people*. To give any of them a name would be to assign a specificity that opposes that desire.

For all my teachers

CHAPTER 1: KNOWLEDGE

The verb, know comes from the Old English *cnawan*, meaning “perceive a thing to be identical with another,” “be able to distinguish,” and “perceive or understand as a fact or truth.” Overwhelmingly, then, knowledge seems to rest heavily on perception—the ways in which a human being (inter)acts with(in) her world. This interaction is embodied. It is of the body. Perception is felt, tasted, smelled, heard, seen through the bodily senses. Sense perception is the initial perception, the knowledge of the thing that is the world felt, seen, heard from the moment we are delivered into it.

After 40 weeks of gestation within the incubatorial space of the womb where our senses are sheltered, protected, and warmed by the body of our mother, we are pitched into the bright light of the world with all its sounds, temperature differentials, light, and shadow. It is a rude awakening as our previously small sphere becomes enormous. No wonder we cry.

To the birth professionals and the parents, it is a relief to hear the cry. The adults in the room perceive the sound as indicative of life. To cry when born is to be identical to being born alive and well. The infant cries, however, because of the physical assault on his senses that his emergence into the world has wrought. His sense of the world is identical to discomfort, pain (maybe?), fear, shock, rupture. This original moment of perception of the world (or even the ungraspable ones that come before *in utero*) that arrives simultaneously with birth is not normally determined as knowledge of the world. Certainly, this isn't even considered at the moment of birth. All the knowledge in the room, instead, becomes understood by linguistic means: the things others say about the situation in interpretation or translation of the phenomena. For what of the baby who does not cry, but, rather, is delivered into a suitably warm, dark, and moist space. The parents may panic. And then, "You have a healthy baby boy," the midwife or doctor says. The knowledge calms as it seeps its way into the body.

In this instance (and the converse may also be considered where the baby's cries are those of distress), the linguistic declaration is the knowledge, perceived as sound but understood by much different means that, while reliant on the senses (to hear, to see), are not sensual but cognitive and linguistic. Once we develop language, we hear words and they form (a kind of) knowledge as they pass through our brains. The higher functions, so to speak, come to dominate over bodily knowing. But bodily knowing does not leave us. Even while Cartesian philosophy attempts to remove the mind from the body, we are not simply knowing brains suspended in fluid and kept in a jar: omniscient disembodied entities. The connection between sensual knowing and linguistic articulation of knowledge begins and remains in the body.

Let us return to the baby, for a moment. Here he is, in the world anew, pre-linguistic and fully attentive. He cries at 1pm because he is hungry. Does he know that he is hungry and that his mother will supply his food and that he

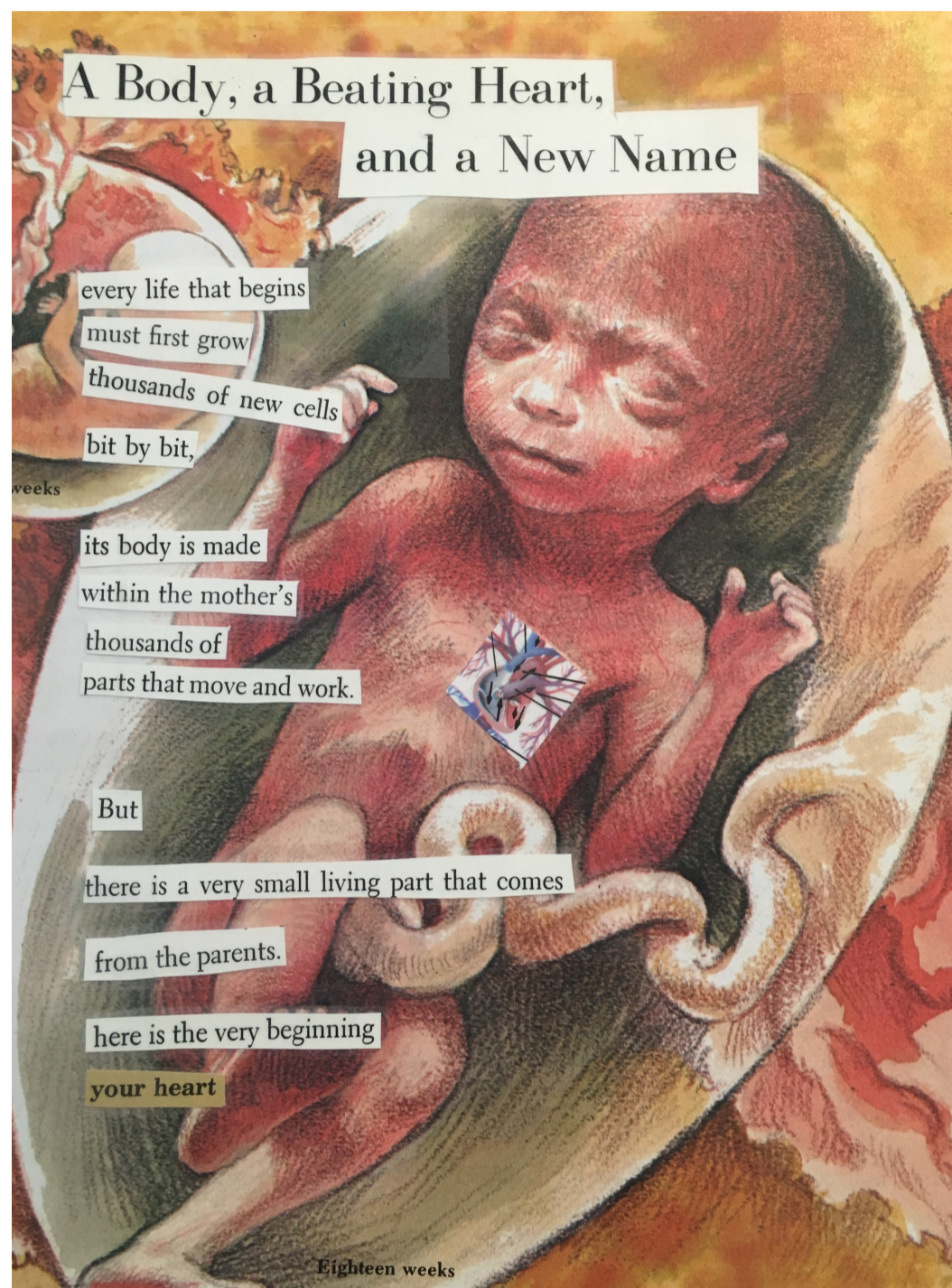
must get her attention in some way? Most people would say that he is acting out of instinct—an embodied need that provokes an action that, through millennia of writing in our genes, is understood (also bodily). One body communicating with another: The baby cries and the mother's milk is let down.

Now contrast this with the teenager and his (now weary) mother. Were the teen to cry, the mother would simply ask him what is wrong. To which he may reply that he is hungry. After admonishing him for acting like a baby, she may tell him not to cry about it and to go get something to eat. But we know the teenager does not act like this. When he is hungry—while he may state it aloud—if able, he will go get something to eat. If he cries, on the other hand, his mother will ask him what is wrong, and he may or may not tell her. However, she no longer thinks his cry is about hunger.

As absurd as this analogy is, it is included to make a point. We can use it to see how knowledge changes as we grow and learn language. And how language is learned in the service of knowledge. No one disputes that my hunger is felt—sensed—in my body. However, if I were to articulate it to my mother, even though it is voiced through my body (my mouth and vocal chords), the knowledge she gains becomes part of a cognitive process where she now knows that I am hungry because I have told her. But no one asks me how I know that I am hungry—only whether or not I am. They assume that I know.

This all seems logical or maybe obvious when dealing with hunger. But what of sensual knowledge that is not linked to a basic human need? How do I know that something is soft? When I pet my dog, I know she is soft. I feel it in my body and can say it with my words. If you pet my dog, you will know the same thing. But what if you came from a pre-linguistic place, had no language and, therefore, no concept for softness. Would you still know that my dog is soft? Or, rather, *what* would you know?

Between bodily sensation/perception and cognitive linguistic articulation there must be a space. And no less so in a pre-linguistic time. Though, in this moment, the space is simply wider. What resides in this space between perception and linguistic articulation? This is where knowledge lives.



CHAPTER 2: REFERENCES

She had always loved dictionaries. Just holding a heavy one in both her hands was always a pleasure she couldn't quite put into words. There was something about their weight, their gravity.

Every time, she would open to random pages and surreptitiously bend down to smell them. The older and mustier, the better. That meant that this dictionary was more right and more true than a newer one.

She would hold the thin paper pages delicately between her fingers when turning them, lest she tear it. It was almost like tissue but not so translucent. She would trace the etched drawings used to depict certain words: *thrush* and *thumb-screw*, *thunderbolt* and *thylacine*. She imagined she could actually feel the impression the etching plates left on the pages.

thrush, wood-thrush,
ouzel, redwing, robin,
etc.

thrush² (thrush), *n.*
[Cf. Dan. *tröske*, Sw.
torsk, thrush.] A dis-
ease, esp. in children,
characterized by whit-
ish spots and ulcers on
the membranes of the
mouth, fauces, etc., due
to a parasitic fungus,
Saccharomyces albi-
cans; also, in horses, a
diseased condition of
the frog.



Song-thrush (*Turdus musicus*).

thrust (thrust), *v. t.*; *thrust*, *thrusting*. [ME. *thrust*,
thristen. from Scand.: cf. Icel. *thrūsta*, *thrust* press.]

thy-me (thī'm), *a.* [LL. *thyinus*, < Gr. *θύϊνος*, < *θυ*
kind of African tree: cf. *thuja*.] Noting a precious wo
mentioned in Rev. xviii. 12: supposed to be that of
sandarac-tree, *Callitris quadrivalvis*.

thy-la-cine (thī'lā-sin), *n.* [NL. *Thylacinus*, < Gr. *θύλα*
pouch.] A carnivorous wolf-like marsupial, *Thylaci*
cynocephalus,
of Tasmania.
Also called
Tasmanian
wolf.

thyme (tīm),
n. [OF. *tym*
(F. *thym*), <
L. *thymum*,
< Gr. *θύμον*,
1 Anu



She would also revel in the fact that she knew the rules of the dictionary. She had been taught how to find a word by looking first at the word in the top left of a page and the last word in the bottom right to determine if her word fell between the two. As a young child she thought this was secret knowledge and despaired a little for the hopeless people who simply turned pages until they found their word. She imagined them setting aside entire afternoons just to discover the meaning of *thurify*.

thurible in religious ceremonies.—**thu-rif-er-ous** (thū-rif'ē-rus), *a.* Producing or bearing frankincense.

thu-ri-fy (thū'ri-fī), *v. t.*; *-fied, -fying.* [OF. *thurifier*, < LL. *thurificare*, < L. *thus* (see *thurible*) + *facere*, make.] To burn incense before or about; perfume with incense; cense.—**thu"ri-fi-ca'tion** (-fi-kā'shon), *n.*

Thu-rin-gi-an (thū-rin'ji-an). **I.** *a.* Of or pertaining to Thuringia, a region in central Germany. **II.** *n.* A native

When she was thirteen years old she found an old dictionary in a second-hand bookstore. It was a New Century Dictionary, printed in 1944 and bound in a dark blue cover that smelled like her father's binoculars—a scent that subtly wafted to her nostrils whenever she opened the binocular case. The blue cover was stamped in great detail. There was an ornate border and, in each corner, a genie's lamp. There was a small stream of smoke coming from each lamp spout and she thought that it represented the mystical knowledge contained within the book.



There was also a logo stamped once in the centre of the cover, and three times on the spine. The logo was a circle with wings and, in the circle she could make out a feathered quill pen on the left, a torch in the centre, and... something else on the right. It was the same size as the pen and the torch but could easily have been smaller in real life. It looked like an archer's arrow without the arrowhead, instead two feathered ends opposite one another.

She didn't understand. And no one she asked could give her an answer either.

She combed the publisher's information page and the front-matter section of the book trying to find a clue as to the meaning behind the image. But she found nothing. She stared at the image, willing it to make itself known to her. Eventually she gave up and just enjoyed recognizing the image and what it represented to her in the form of the one book that she cherished the most out of all her worldly possessions.

Years later, after the Internet was invented, she would try again online.

CHAPTER 3: LANGUAGE

I never told you about my predilection for swords, did I? All sorts. When the Internet was in its infancy I would dial up (remember that sound?) and browse images of broadswords, rapiers, foils, and everything in between. I was partial to the rapiers with their long skinny blades and arabesque hilts. I fancied myself a knight reincarnate. It's the reason I specialized in mediaeval lit at school. That and the breathtaking teacher who taught Chaucer. She was my reason for being back then. To do well. To write well. To be intelligent and critical and innovative and to express myself thusly.

My greatest achievement was when she wrote comments on one of my papers and stated that I write beautifully. I must have read and re-read that comment a thousand times. I can still see it in my mind's eye. Her flowy teacher writing. It was in green pen, I think. Her words made mine valid. Her words made my existence mean something. At a time when I struggled with pain and illness—when I spent large parts of my days in an internal battle with myself—words were a *panacea*. So much time I spent then writing a

corpus as a weapon against my withering corpus. I was creating a legacy and front and centre stood Love in all its forms. I embodied the courtly knight. I loved from afar. I fought. And I wrote. I was Troilus and my Criseyde took many forms. No, I never bought a sword. But words were my greatest ally. My tool. My trusty side-arm.

And then time passed.

I got well.

And my life moved on.

To read the words I wrote then reveals a character not of this world. I hesitate to say that it is me and, yet, it is so very me I blush hotly when those words—so far removed from who I am now—transport me in an instant back to that time. I am at once embarrassed and proud that those words came from me. I recognize them. They are familiar.

I have both recited and recycled pieces of those texts in later works. I have spoken them to the people I have loved. I have turned them on their head and brandished them as weapons against those with whom I have fought. Language has always been my best tool and most deadly weapon. I have used it to fix broken situations and to break them anew when frenetic insecurity took hold once more.

The last time I attacked you with my words, you fought back. It stunned me, angered me, fueled me, and made me intensely sad. But mostly, it scared me. For behind your words, in your tone and look, there was a threat. A detaching. And suddenly I realized that you were not my enemy. That, until now, you had no double-edge. That the sword you kept hidden was never meant for me but you would use it on me if I persisted.

So, I retreated and turned to words and more familiar tools to soothe me. To help me find my way back to myself. To help me to repair that which only I

had damaged. To realize, once and for all, that language is a tool and a weapon. It all depends how you wield it.

CHAPTER 4: PROFESSIONS

Attention all those attending the New Teacher orientation. We will be commencing the Lecture at 1pm sharp. Please make your way to the Lecture Hall.

The announcement came over the PA system and rang through the halls in the old building, bouncing off the polished concrete floors and thick, green-tinted glass windows. The noise might be correctly described as a din. The excitement in the narrow spaces between bodies was palpable and gave off a peculiar odour, heat, and vibration. To someone prone to fainting spells or panic attacks, this place would definitely be a trigger.

As one, the throng of humans moved like a surf seen from far away: slow and lumbering, but indicative of immense power. The soon-to-be audience filed into the massive lecture Hall and took their seats in all parts of the room.

Although it was built almost a century earlier, the Operations department of the University had thoughtfully updated the Hall with state-of-the-art acoustic panels hung artfully on the walls and ceiling. The large, pewter, rectangular pieces were the size of conference tables and looked like three-dimensional portals to other worlds. One dared not sit too close, lest they be sucked into the abyss of Space and end up on another planet. Regardless of their monstrosity, however, they did deliver as promised and the room sounded decidedly muted even with all the people inside impatiently waiting for the Lecture to begin.

At precisely 1pm, a well-dressed man of average height strolled onto the stage purposefully as a hush fell over the room. He was the Dean of the Faculty and always addressed the pre-service teachers on their first day of school. People described his speeches as inspiring and motivating, and the students in the hall accorded him the respect he commanded.

He walked to the podium arranged in the centre and the lights in the Hall dimmed. The stage was lit by floor spots and the whole wooden surface glowed around him.

As the Dean cleared his throat and prepared his cue cards to begin, a woman walked casually onto the stage from his left, and right up to the podium.

The Dean, taken aback by her sudden presence, turned and slightly moved away from the microphone and to the side of the podium. The room he made was all she needed and, as she moved to the centre of the podium, he retreated even more, for such is how we react when strangers come too close to us at odd times. The audience, for their part, only emitted a low, questioning murmur.

Without even a trace of a smile, she scanned the audience slowly, from right to left, to centre, and then from the nearest face to the top of the last row. And then, she spoke:

I just have one thing to say but, before I do, I want you all to think very hard about how you feel about children. I want you to ask yourselves, Do I truly like children? Do I truly love children? Am I committed to being around them all day, everyday, whether I “feel like it” or not?

The audience murmur got perceptibly louder and more alarmed as they absorbed her words and looked at one another perplexed. The Dean, for his part, only looked at her, stunned, but made no attempt to remove her from the stage.

The woman scanned the room once more and continued:

And now, if, in your heart, you know that you are not fully committed to being with children with love and patience and care, day in and day out, then what I have to say is directed at you...

Locking eyes on the third row, she spoke evenly and firmly:

Leave this lecture hall: this profession is not for you. If you stay here, mark my words, you will ruin it for everyone. Get. Out. Now.

She swept the room with her fiery gaze once more, turned, and left the stage. The Dean, open-mouthed, watched her walk out. He then returned to his rightful place at the podium and stared blankly at the audience as someone in the front row bitterly called out, “Who the hell was that?”

Blankly looking down at the angry face of the speaker, he simply shrugged, “I have no idea.”

CHAPTER 5: PLAGIARISM

This Is Just To Say

The Law of Conservation of Energy states that energy may not be created or destroyed, only changed in form. All creative endeavours are subject to the same Law. We do not create out of nothing but simply change or utilize media to produce an effect: a representation of the cognitive process which deigns us to place this next to that, chip away here or there, mix this with a cropped version of that, take this short story and rewrite it for the stage. The piece (the work) is the material manifestation of the drive which leads me here—the passion which compels me to make art. (see *desire*)

But why am I not satisfied with the thought only or the inner mind's vision? (see *dreams*) Why do I seek to engage physically certain objects and often in ways they may have never imagined? Why does a particular scene hold a significance for me or lead me to think that to capture it would be *an* or *the*

ultimate expression of my artistic thought? (see social media) Why does a poem inspire me to manipulate its language for my own ends? (see teenage angst) And what makes me think that at any point what I am doing is creating? (see nihilism)

Some artists admit their predilection for collage or *pastiche*. We even have words such as collage or pastiche to lend credibility to this sort of endeavour: But it is all as such. We are all simply changing that which was already there. (see global warming) Not some postmodern apathetic notion of the futility and unoriginality of existence in this time. It is a continuum upon which we sit. Ashes to ashes...paint to canvas...words to paper...Amen. The matter remains the same only altered by the contortions we exact upon it and despite its inclinations otherwise. (see agential realism) To be an artist is to be despotic with one's resources. I make them do what I want them to do; I change them in form. Or do I?

When I put paint to canvas it remains paint and canvas. I have simply exacted a juxtaposition neither the paint nor canvas had the will or means to exact. I do not create, therefore, I rearrange. Art may not be created or destroyed, only rearranged in form. I rearrange; therefore, I am! (do not see Descartes)

The Law of Conservation of Art insists that adaptation is inevitable and that nothing is original, since the origin exists in a far off place we are unable to grasp. There is no context to claim that unadulterated and raw media are any more original than an already extant piece of writing or visual art—or *vice versa*. Perhaps the problem is in the language of description. (see semiotics) Perhaps the language of description gives us a wealth of impossible concepts to strive for (see perfection and originality; see truth). But, perhaps this is not a problem, after all, rather, an impetus.

Art, like humans, must evolve in order to exist. This evolution requires, along with motivation, the altering of raw materials *and* that certain other works are co-opted and changed in form.

*I have made
the argument
that was in
my brain*

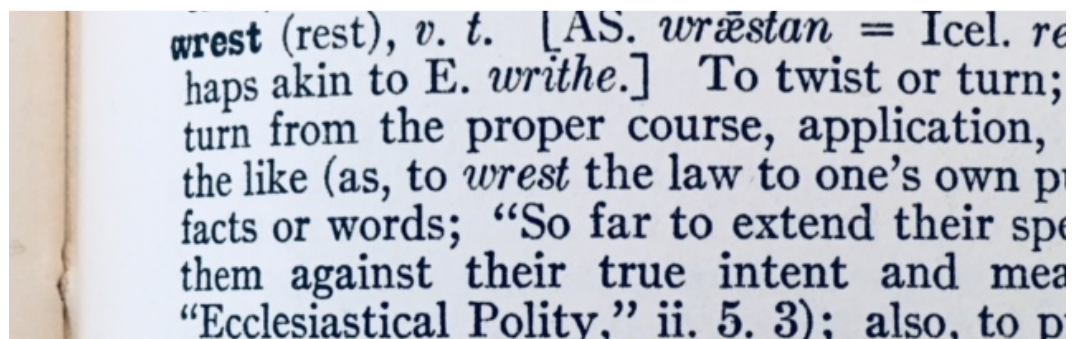
*and which
you may or may not
have already
made, once or twice before.*

*Forgive me
when I say it again.
It is so sweet
and so cold.*

CHAPTER 6: EVIDENCE

When she was 17 years old, she found the yellowed, torn page of paper tucked between two pages of *The New Century Dictionary* (published in 1944). Between pages 2230 and 2231—*wrath* to *wrinkle*—the single sheet sat and waited patiently to be discovered.

The writing was in very light ink but still legible. It looked as though it had been made with a quill pen given that the loops and down-strokes of the neat, slanted cursive were thicker than the up-strokes. There was no signature or sign of who had penned the note. She had been looking up the word *wrest* for an English essay on 1984 when she found it.



wrest (rest), *v. t.* [AS. *wræstan* = Icel. *re*
haps akin to E. *writhe*.] To twist or turn;
turn from the proper course, application,
the like (as, to *wrest* the law to one's own p
facts or words; "So far to extend their spe
them against their true intent and mea
"Ecclesiastical Polity," ii. 5. 3); also, to p

Just over a month ago, her English 12 teacher—a diminutive, well-dressed, 40-something woman, with enormous grey eyes and a penchant for cardigans and scarves—had brought Orwell’s novel to life with her passionate and deep understanding of the text. Over the course of a few weeks, the teacher had helped her class tease out the nuances of *NewSpeak*, the *Ministry of Love*, and Winston’s “love-affairs” with both Julia and O’Brien.

Both of them? a boy in the front row had asked dubiously.

Not literally, her teacher had said, eyes sparkling, *no pun intended!* *But yes, Winston was in love with both of them in different ways. Can you find evidence of this love in the text?*

For the next few minutes the class took up the challenge and read and re-read feverishly looking for textual evidence of Winston’s love for O’Brien.

She looked up when she had found it, straight into her teacher’s eyes.

Tell the class, her teacher said to her quietly, as if they had already agreed upon this moment.

She hesitated for just a second before she spoke:

On page 6, right when we meet Winston it’s there, clear as anything. I don’t know how I missed it. I guess I got distracted when he mentioned Julia...the girl with the dark hair...

Read it out loud, please, said her teacher smiling.

And she read—

Winston had seen O'Brien perhaps a dozen times in almost as many years. He felt deeply drawn to him, and not solely because he was intrigued by the contrast between O'Brien's urbane manner and his prize-fighter's physique. Much more it was because of a secretly held belief—or perhaps not even a belief, merely a hope—that O'Brien's political orthodoxy was not perfect. Something in his face suggested it irresistibly. And again, perhaps it was not even unorthodoxy that was written in his face, but simply intelligence.

She had looked up after reading, and once again into her teacher's grey eyes. They seem to be prompting her to continue with her analysis.

She knew that a good literary analysis makes a point, provides evidence, usually in the form of a quotation, and then seeks to explain that evidence in light of the point initially made. Her teacher had taught them to remember this using the appropriately crude acronym P-E-E: Point, Evidence, Explanation; and had pointed out that this strategy was applicable not only for literary analysis but also to make a compelling argument of any kind. She had begun speaking again without thinking—

I guess this shows that Winston actually notices O'Brien's physical body and is impressed by it. Orwell says he is "deeply drawn to him" and that can totally be taken in a love sort of way, I guess. He also mentions his mannerisms in the sentence before and, I don't know...I don't think people notice those things unless they are paying attention and paying attention usually means something. I mean, we know from later on that Winston notices things but, yeah, I think you're right. He is kind of in love with him. Maybe not him as a guy but the idea of him. His real-ness...his human-ness...and his intelligence. Yeah, I can see it.

She had nervously glanced around at the rest of the class after she had spoken and felt immediately embarrassed at her stream of consciousness. Her teacher was beaming.

She looked again at the slip of paper with its strange symbols and wondered how old it was. It certainly seemed old. At least since 1944, she thought. But, maybe not..? It wasn't out of the realm of possibility that the piece of paper was older than the book but had been tucked into the pages for safe-keeping. Or hiding. Like Winston and his diary, maybe someone had hidden the piece of paper in the innocuous dictionary so that it wouldn't be found. 1944 was still before the end of WWII. Maybe the dictionary had been kept by spies and use to pass notes back and forth.

Instantly she laughed out loud at her imagination. One of the reasons she loved the dictionary was because of its weight. Why would spies decide to lug around something so heavy just to pass notes? She knew about the Enigma Machine used by the Germans to pass signals during the war. They wouldn't even need to hide things in books because they were hidden in the words, she thought. But, I guess you never really know...

No, she thought. I don't have time for this. She would have to investigate the paper later, she decided, after her essay was done and after she graduated high school and finally had some time to learn the things she wanted to learn.

Shaking her head she tucked the found page back between wrath and winkle and continued with her exposition of Winston's quiet resistance to Big Brother.

The Law of Conservation of
Mass and Matter

$$\frac{\partial \rho}{\partial t} + \nabla \cdot (\rho \mathbf{v}) = \psi$$

or

$$\frac{dM}{dt} = \frac{d}{dt} \int \rho dV = 0$$

(Things that) Matter cannot

Be created nor

Destroyed

Only changed in form.

CHAPTER 7: JUSTIFICATIONS

“Why do I have to learn to read and write?” her 10 year old son whined as he sat dutifully at the kitchen table, pencil in hand, ready for the mommy-administered spelling test of the evening.

Looking up from her computer, she considered his question thoughtfully. On her screen was an essay on Orwell’s *1984* written by one of her less-than stellar English 12 students. The student was not stupid—as a teacher, she would never truly believe that without some sort of clinical diagnosis—but he struggled with making himself understood, both orally and in writing. It seemed the thoughts were so jumbled in his head that any hope of assembling them into coherence on paper was lost as soon as he began. Glancing again at the essay, she also noted the other more technical difficulties he suffered: repetitive sentence construction, incorrect grammar, spelling errors, and simplistic expression.

Her standards for academic composition at the grade 12 level aligned closely with the government performance standards published over the 22 years of her career—even while using such documents were no longer *de riguer* when assessing students' work. She trusted her professional expertise and her track record with students spoke for itself.

She was highly-regarded in her field for being a disciplined and meticulous teacher with an evolved pedagogy. She did not know it but many student teachers who had the good fortune of doing their practica with her considered her a “master teacher”. However, she knew many teachers who had been practicing as long as she, or even longer, who remained woe-fully tied to outdated teaching methods and philosophies. Not to mention those who clocked out at 3:30pm with nary a pile of marking in sight.

She always seemed to be taking home stacks of student work and the piles—though they certainly changed in content—never really got any smaller. Such was the life of an English teacher, she supposed. It was what I signed up for, she thought. And she wouldn't have had it any other way. She loved her job.

As a fresh-faced 23 year-old, right out of her Bachelour of Education program, she began teaching in her old neighborhood at a school with a reputation for being a little rough. It was situated nearest to the downtown core and enjoyed the hallmarks of an inner-city school even though the city was small. All cities seem to attract the same striation of social class and wealth. And they all had to go to school. She had remained with this school for 21 years, only moving in the last year to a different secondary school and demographic of the population. But, regardless of what kinds of sneakers they wore or the difficulties at home, she concluded that teenagers were still essentially the same and that her job was to teach them to communicate.

She had learned a lot herself over the years of her career. She described herself as ever-changing in her practice and lived this as well. She was not a

“binder teacher”, as she called them: teachers who, at the beginning of the school year simply cracked open their decades old binder for the course and began from the beginning. She altered her practice, content, methods, and assessment as directives came down from the Ministry and as the field of education morphed with the times. She prided herself on being connected with the forefront in education but was not an indiscriminating consumer. She was not taken in by fads and repackaged instructional methods. She had been around long enough to recognize the cycles that these things travelled. No, when she adopted a new teaching strategy or philosophy, it truly was novel and she tested it profusely before making it her own. Tweaking it, she called it.

Even this latest essay assignment she gave to her English 12 class had gone through countless iterations. Sure, it was still an essay but the topics, over the years, had become more thoughtful and more flexible. Earlier in her career, she was taught to limit essay topics to no more than two clearly defined questions that were worded in such a way as to point even the least savvy student in the right direction. Emphasis was on expression and technique rather than demanding the student to think. Essay writing, then, was about the application of writing and reading skills. Now her essay topics ranged and she included versions of these earlier ones in addition to more deep thinking questions. The goal had changed in an effort to personalize written work to each student's abilities. By the time the major essay rolled around in the Spring, she was fairly confident that she knew not only which student would choose which topic, but how convincingly they would make their argument, as well. This, she felt, was the hallmark of a good teacher.

She loved teaching 1984 to grade 12s. She loved watching the slow dawning on their faces as they inevitably made connections to their own personally perceived autocracies. It never bored her to hear the same things being said about Winston and Big Brother. The rage they levied at O' Brien and their profound disappointment in Julia. Often there was a handful of students who

understood the strength inherent in Winston's tiny dissents against the Party. And, every once in a while, there was a kid who just "got it". Someone who, despite his or her young age, saw the deeper meaning behind Orwell's text: that something as simple and taken for granted as language had immense power.

Out of the two English 12 classes she taught currently, there was only one student who "got it". This student was the kind she knew would come back and visit her in about five years, after having completed a degree in Literature, and on the verge of something exciting and exotic. She loved when students did this. It made her feel a part of the grander narrative of education which wasn't always apparent when she was alone in her portable.

She became a teacher because her options were limited with a major in English and a minor in French. She was uninterested in graduate school and wanted to be working doing something meaningful and professional. She decided to become a teacher because it made the most sense. From the moment she began teaching secondary school, however, she knew she had made the right decision. Although, or maybe because, her own high school days were fraught with misunderstanding and shyness, she was deeply empathetic with the teens she taught. This combined with a love of language and writing, and a flair for the dramatic pause, made her the quintessential English teacher.

"Mommy!" Her son said forcefully, interrupting her thoughts. He looked at her curiously. "I asked you a question. Why do I have to learn to read and write?"

Looking at her beautiful son with his light eyes, bored expression, and decades of life ahead of him; she hesitated only a moment before she spoke.

“Because I said so,” she said with finality. “Now let’s get your spelling done, please. Make sure you print very neatly. Show me that you care. The first word...is *FREEDOM*.”