

Prologue.

THESE ARE micro-stories and events, tiny tales, written to be read, not written to be seen. The worst stories, of course, are stories never written OR seen. They happen without witnesses. Or witnesses never testify. These stories, though, are testimonies. These stories are their own witnesses.

Because these fictions are written to be read, written in an ancient time when too many people were unaccustomed to writing and reading much more than “tweets,” you may notice some peculiarities. Non-visual peculiarities. For example, seemingly random things, things that don’t fit. At least they don’t seem to fit. Like the word “discombobulated.” Or a digressive discourse on a word, like “testimony.” Did you know that “testimony” means to witness, rooted in the word “testicle,” so logically you can’t testify if you’re female? Only women can be “hysterical” because the root word “hyster” is a womb. You’re sorely lacking, men. There’s no womb for you. You can’t be hysterical. Instead, you’re NUTS. Etymologically speaking.

The voice in these fictions is the voice of the narrator, not the voice of the author. The narrator’s voice is apt for the characters; the effusiveness of flowers has been left behind. There’s little emotional excrement. The diction is dense, terse, truncated, like the word “apt” instead of “appropriate.” Description and dialogue are sometimes multi-purposeful, double entendres, a prose version of Gerard Manley Hopkins’ compact vocabulary. The narration is third person past tense, with the exception of one first person episode and one entry in present tense. Second person is rare, but occasionally the narrator looks right at you the way the subject of a portrait follows you with her eyes, and addresses you, like this sentence does now.

Each fiction can stand alone, but like beads on a necklace, something threads them together. They’re a polylogy, kind of like *The Arabian Nights*, stories that Scheherazade improvised each night for the sultan so that she would live to see another day. Or like Geoffrey Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*, told on a spring pilgrimage. The font in these tales, Book Antiqua, is an homage to the look of Middle English text in Chaucer’s time.

The characters in these fictions are mainly two people, Codell and Dr. Blood, urban peasants far from urbane, pilgrims on sojourns to places without locations, never leaving where they’re at. Dr. Blood isn’t really a doctor, and his name isn’t really Blood. Codell’s real name is Codell. It’s his first name, and everyone says it wrong. It’s co-DELL. We never learn his last name. He’s called one other name, and that one he no longer uses. Names of streets in these fictions are real, as are most of the place names. Other place names, sort of real. Real or not, names often have meanings hidden within. Names matter as much in fiction as they matter outside of fiction. Names survive death. But only for a time, and then names, too, die.

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Codell's mother, a character mostly *in absentia*, had her reasons for naming Codell "Codell." Her reasons had nothing to do with Codell, Kansas, but there are some coincidences between Detroit and the small Kansas town.

"Motor" was the original name of Codell, Kansas. Before machines, "motor" was a force that could move, something with which the people of Codell, Kansas were well acquainted, first in the form of the Union Pacific Railroad. In the late 1880s, the railroad, refusing to build its depot near Motor because of a price dispute, bought land about a mile away, named it Codell, and built its depot there instead. The buildings in Motor moved to Codell, but they didn't stand for long. During World War I, tornados hit Codell, remarkably, three years in a row. The third tornado blew out much of the town. Residents who had been compelled to move a generation earlier by a transportation giant were displaced again, buffeted year after year after year by forces beyond their control. The Motor City was never the same.

Codell, unlike the people of Codell, Kansas, is not easy to like. He's easy to look at, though, an irony of stories written to be read instead of seen. He's got issues, physical and otherwise, that aren't visible. For example, he's got gastric disturbances, intestinal concerns, we'll say. He doesn't always smell good. He takes care of himself as best as he can. He spends a lot of time in bars. He fails with women - not because women always reject him. Something comes along to thwart a relationship or he thwarts it himself.

Codell at times is a static character and at times dynamic. He can change from an impassive fly-on-the-wall observer to an insect that stings. He can change from a tourist in his own life to a participant in the world around him. He's a loner, introverted. At times he could be a kindred spirit with Prince Myshkin in Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *The Idiot* or with Meursault in Albert Camus' *The Stranger*, estranged, but not pathological as are those characters. Codell might be *The Stranger Idiot* or *The Idiot Stranger*. At other times things happen not because of Codell but to or around him, without explanation or apparent reason, like they happen to Josef K. in Franz Kafka's *The Trial*. At times, events and dialogue are absurd or fantastic as in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* or in the stories and novels of Gabriel García Márquez.

Codell and Dr. Blood have a lot in common. They walk a lot. They both ride busses, and Dr. Blood paints them. Paints on them. Tags them in red with his name. Codell did some painting when he was a kid. On the busses and off, Codell doesn't always know where he wants to go, but he gets somewhere. In contrast, Dr. Blood knows exactly where he wants to go, but he doesn't usually get there. Sanguine becomes him. It's a quick journey for Dr. Blood and a slow one for Codell. That's how these fictions

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end and how they begin. Before you know it, they're over, but they may not let you go. Your mind keeps going. At least that's the intent.

There are a couple of regular inhabitants in Codell's world, Michael Blumenthal (MB) and Victor. Codell and MB live in the same tenement. Victor sleeps next door in a tenement as abandoned as he is. Victor drinks; MB doesn't. MB has to remember to take his meds; Victor's medication is drinking. Victor's heart, to quote William Butler Yeats' "Sailing to Byzantium," is "sick with desire/And fastened to a dying animal." Victor and MB shape Codell in ways that none of them realize. They're the closest thing Codell has to friends.

Those characters are your cast, your outcasts. They're people who the vast majority don't want to see, smell, hear or touch: vagrants, drunks, the mentally unsound, loners and wanderers, the unemployable. The residents without residences. Imagine them.

There are a host of minor personas as well: aliens, barflies and bartenders, baseball fans and beggars, Black Elk, blue collar workers, a Bohemian artist, a bookie, bus drivers and bus riders, Charley Pride, the Chimera, civil rights activist, cockroaches, college students, doctors, dogs everywhere, a drug dealer, at least two ghosts, Hecate, lawyers, a man of letters, Mark "The Bird" Fidrych, Mitch Ryder and other musicians, police officers and FBI agents, prostitutes, a rabbit and two rats, the Rolling Stones, a security guard, and a three-legged dog named Jesus. They're as much part of the setting as they are crucial to the events of these fictions.

In fiction, in life, you can't understand characters if you don't understand the setting, just like how you can't understand Russia if you don't know about the Russian climate, and how you can't understand America if you don't know about slavery and the Civil War. The setting here is Detroit, Michigan, the Motor City - Motown or, once upon a time, the City of Churches. It's July of 1980, give or take a year or two, with occasional excursions to 1968, give or take a year or two. Not every event has a time marker, but you can usually figure it out.

The weather in Detroit that summer of 1980 started mild enough. June was wet. By mid July, heat and humidity pushed in from the south. On the morning of July 16, 1980, intense storms and a derecho ripped through southeast Michigan. Winds in Detroit blew harder than 100 miles per hour. The derecho foreshadowed a political storm in national politics from which there was no break, no escape, no turning back. But I digress and get ahead of myself.

The specific setting for most of these fictions is Detroit's Cass Corridor. Codell lived at the north end of the Corridor near Wayne State University, a couple of miles north of downtown. The Corridor was bounded on the east by Woodward Avenue. Cass

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Avenue bisected and ran parallel to that thoroughfare. In Detroit, you were East side, poor, tough and rumble, or West side, but the south end of the Cass Corridor was so close to downtown that the East-West distinction didn't matter much. Almost all of the characters are pickled in the brine of the Corridor. Some of these fictions are set in bars, a pickling of another kind.

On its western flank, the Corridor was bordered by the John C. Lodge Freeway, M-10, north to south, or if you're an optimist from south to north, a snake of cars through Southfield, a city of glass boxes. The snake went underground near Greenfield in a sub-surface canal that some people hauled through at 20, 30 or 40 miles per hour over the speed limit. It broke free after Telegraph and Lahser - even the locals pronounced Lahser three different ways. Is it "LASH-er" or "LAH-s^her" or "LAH-ser"? By the time you got to Lahser, outbound, the Lodge felt suburban.

Detroit had a reputation that it was unsafe, and within Detroit the Corridor had its own reputation. Again quoting from "Sailing to Byzantium," the Corridor was "no country for old men" for reasons that Yeats never imagined. It was reputed to be a place you didn't go especially at night. That was the view from the outside. These fictions are a view from the inside.

Settings always take on some hues, and the hues of these fictions, for reasons obvious to any Detroiter, are black, white and red. Is any American city Blacker than Detroit? Yes, if you only count heads in Detroit's dwindling population, but no if you look at the percentage of residents. Overheard: "Black people run that city."

Detroit's long history of black and white is anything but black on white. Sometimes it was white on black, black on black, and white on white. Sometimes it was Black and right; that was before "black" was capitalized. The characters see their shares of red, red, the richest of colors in meaning and symbol. Sometimes the setting is unclear, or ambiguous, or contradictory like contronyms: sanction, slug, overlook, buckle, clip and carbuncle, all unclear without context. "Carbuncle" serves both the lovers and the haters of the Corridor.

Detroit was, and remains, more than a setting. It's an identity. Detroit was a synonym for the American auto industry, a source of Detroit pride. The Motor City was the home of the Big Three auto makers, Chrysler, Ford, and General Motors (GM). But by 1980, Detroit had a lot of rattles under its hood. The glory days of the 1960s, of the Ford Mustang - the 'Stang - were long gone. Detroit didn't offer what it used to. The new American cars in 1980, cars like the AMC Eagle, the Dodge Miranda, and Plymouth's K-cars, no one heard of and no one remembers. The only car Detroit offered that year with any longevity was the Ford Escort - not exactly a car that made you say, "WOW!" What Detroit put on the track rolled in a pack of international competition. Detroit pushed

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for tariffs on the imports that American drivers increasingly preferred. Detroit's car pride endured public shaming and mocking on account of the Ford Pinto, a really good car except for an unfortunate penchant for the gas tank to explode in rear-end collisions.

Car culture was not only the car itself; it was the Interstate highway system. Detroit and the Interstates began in symbiosis, but it took little time for the Interstates to become parasitic. The freeway system was touted and sold as progress, which it was in some ways, that would bring "urban renewal." At the same time, it was a juggernaut of urban destruction:

(1) The freeways eradicated communities. Detroit threw itself under its own wheels on the new I-75 Fisher Freeway, razing and paving over selected old neighborhoods - the Black Bottom and Paradise Valley neighborhoods, at the time called "the Negro community."

(2) Housing projects were built for displaced residents, and how did that work out?

(3) Where the expressways didn't eradicate communities, they separated them. Detroit garroted itself with ribbons of white concrete.

(4) It exacerbated racial conflict. No few number of folk called urban renewal "Negro removal." In that racially charged context, the Interstates was a noose.

(5) It facilitated and expedited abandonment of the city. People moved out of Detroit in droves and took their money with them. The Interstate paved the way for a fast, easy escape to the new suburbs with their shopping malls and parking lots, monuments to consumerism, pantheons of apathy and delirium. It's no slight irony that Detroit lived by the car and bled by the car.

Another irony of Detroit's expressways and cars is that, as much as cars mean to Detroit, most of the characters in these fictions don't have cars. They wouldn't have been able to get loans to buy them, and couldn't afford to insure them, maintain them, or keep the gas tanks full. Most people in these fictions who owned cars (1) didn't live in the Cass Corridor, (2) didn't want for any necessity, and (3) were, therefore, rich by comparison.

As integral as cars and expressways were to Detroit, music plays in these fictions. Cathartic and therapeutic, music can be a rejuvenating balm. It's no conceit, as Tennessee Williams wrote in *The Glass Menagerie*, that "in memory, everything seems to happen to music." For Detroit in the 1960s, music meant Motown.

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Detroit blues, soul, gospel and jazz laid the foundation for Motown. Bluesman John Lee Hooker came from Mississippi to Detroit in 1943. Della Reese signed her first record contract in 1953. Dinah Washington, a presence in Detroit through her marriage to the Detroit Lions' star "Night Train" Lane, and the dynamic Jackie Wilson sang in multiple musical genres. They performed big and lived bigger. Aretha Franklin, the Queen of Soul, transcended time, releasing her twenty-sixth studio album in 1980.

The Blues were real, but the Blues didn't sell like pop music. Jazz was hip, but it didn't sell like pop, either. Ditto for Soul. Motown, on the other hand, was all about pop, and Motown sold.

Motown was the city, a recording label, and the music itself. The founder Berry Gordy's self-proclaimed "Hitsville U.S.A." was no exaggeration. Motown had no rival in its reach, saturation, and the number of its superstars. Diana Ross and the Supremes had hit after hit. In musical genius, there were the prodigious Stevie Wonder, Smokey Robinson and Marvin Gaye. With everyone else - Martha and the Vandellas, The Four (and only four) Tops, The Temptations, The Jackson Five, The Commodores, The Miracles, Gladys Knight and the Pips, The Spinners, and others - they took your breath away.

By 1980, notwithstanding Michael Jackson's album *Thriller* and Diana Ross's top ten single "Upside Down," Motown was history in Detroit. The label and the artists were long gone to Los Angeles and elsewhere, and the Hitsville U.S.A. building would become a museum.

Yet Motown was far from Detroit's only claim to pop music fame. In 1980, rocker Bob Seger and The Silver Bullet Band released the album *Against the Wind*. The same year, Seger's Detroit-born friend Glenn Frey broke up with the Eagles, and hard rock guitar hero Ted Nugent, the Motor City Madman, released his sixth and most successful solo album, *Scream Dream*. Mitch Ryder, after the Detroit Wheels had fallen off, attempted a comeback with "Ain't Nobody White (can sing the blues)." Alice Cooper, the proto-punk godfather of shock rock, hailed from Detroit and returned to Michigan from Los Angeles in the mid-1970s. "[L.A. was] on the wrong kind of drug for us," Cooper said. "They were on acid and we were basically drinking beer. We fit much more in Detroit than we did anywhere else." Inspired by an Alice Cooper performance, the Detroit band Death in the 1970s became the first all African American punk band. Wendy O. Williams (WOW) brought the Plasmatics and her chaotic, sexualized antics to a Detroit club on September 20, 1980.

Shock-rock, counter-culture pop and punk rock drilled Detroit. The Motor City 5 (MC5) had "kicked out the jams" in 1969, having earlier inspired the Ann Arbor group Iggy and the Stooges. In 1980, Fred "Sonic" Smith of MC5 married Patti Smith, who five

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years earlier had ridden *Horses* to punk rock posterity before she hit big with "Because the Night." Smith and Smith settled in St. Clair Shores, north of Detroit.

Less subversive, less direct and more melodic than the punkers and the shockers was New Wave. The mostly-British music could be twitchy, coy, not always what it seemed to be. David Byrne and The Talking Heads, Elvis Costello and the Attractions, Blondie, and The Human League white-washed American pop sensibilities. Detroit contributed The Romantics. In matching monochromatic suits, they looked like shiny versions of the Temptations and the Four Tops. Their single "What I Like About You" was only moderately popular at the time. A year before Wendy O's Detroit shock-rock show, the Cars played Detroit. Their sarcastically droll hit, "Good Times Roll," is an anthem for Detroit fiction: "let the stories be told/they can say what they want."

By 1980, Disco - the word, the music and the dance all imported from European discotheques - had fallen as fast and precipitously as it had risen. The mainstream had embraced Disco, but the mainstream was fickle. Public sentiment turned so badly on Disco that on July 12, 1979, baseball's Chicago White Sox sponsored a Disco Demolition Night at a double-header with the Detroit Tigers. Between games, a crate of vinyl Disco records was exploded on the field. Thousands of fans chanting "disco sucks" cascaded out of the stands and rampaged. The damage to the field was so bad that the White Sox (after losing game one) forfeited game two. Disco was declared dead.

But the death pronouncement was premature. Disco survived in various forms and ways. In The Spinners' cover of "Working My Way Back To You," Motown met disco and morphed into a smooth amalgam of mirrors, lights, choreography, vocals, and color-coordinated outfits with bell bottoms and wide collars. Incongruously, the Rolling Stones contributed their disco-like "Emotional Rescue."

Disco also survived in house bands and house music. Funk, soul and R&B meshed with Disco in dozens of dance clubs. They could draw a few thousand partiers and go all night. The stars were the DJs. Disco was giving birth to Techno and electronic dance music (EDM). In the mid 1980s, a trio of Bellevue, Michigan teens founded Techno EDM. Music Television (MTV) was about to revolutionize the art and the industry, providing a visual medium and a broad audience for studio productions, live concerts and club shows.

Perhaps the music least expected in Car City was country-western. Yet country, including blue-grass, honky-tonk and rockabilly, was vibrant on WJR radio and in live shows. In 1980, the Rockabilly Cats and others frequented the Cass Corridor at Alvin's Finer Delicatessen. Night transformed the deli into the Twilight Bar.

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Like cars and music, Detroit's professional sports play into these fictions. By 1980, the Detroit Pistons (basketball) and Detroit Lions (football) were *de facto* the Pontiac Pistons and Pontiac Lions. Both teams had left Detroit for the Pontiac Silverdome, the Lions in 1975 and the Pistons in 1978. Detroit's new downtown venue, the Joe Louis Arena, was hockey home to the Redwings, known in 1980 as the Deadwings due to their 26-43-11 record. The Joe was also home to boxer Thomas Hearns, AKA The Hitman AKA the Motor City Cobra. Hearns fought and won at the Joe four times in 1980, two knock-outs and two TKOs. His 30 and 0 record earned him Fighter of the Year.

In baseball, the Detroit Tigers played at The Corner, the local shorthand for Tiger Stadium at Michigan and Trumbull. They were frustratingly mediocre in 1980 (84 wins, 78 losses). Their roster included ace pitcher Mark "The Bird" Fidrych, a national sensation known for talking to himself and the ball, manicuring the pitcher's mound, winning games, and drawing capacity crowds. In August 1980, nagged by injury, the Bird pitched his last game in Detroit before over 48,000 "Bird watchers." The Tigers lost that night, but Codell won.

Beyond Detroit's sports, cars and music, there was, of course, a broader background for these fictions, Codell all the characters. Like every year, 1980 was a maelstrom of politics, tragedy and more.

1980 was a presidential election year, and the Republican National Convention was at the Joe Louis Arena. On July 17, the day after the derecho, the Republican Party nominated Ronald Reagan for President. Reagan's slogan was "Let's Make America Great Again." The party platform promised that Republicans would stand with Black (back then, "black") Americans for equal rights and economic progress. There were a few black delegates, the most prominent being the convention secretary, Dr. Aris Allen, who called the roll on Reagan's nomination. That November, with the support of "Reagan Democrats" - a phrase that, a year earlier, would've been an oxymoron - Reagan was elected President. Whether that was triumph or tragedy depends on your politics. Reagan had yet to proclaim that it was morning again in America or that the Soviet Union was an evil empire.

In February 1980, the United States mens' Olympic hockey team, a group of amateurs, beat Russia's team of professionals in the so-called Miracle on Ice. The euphoria of that victory against all odds paled, however, against a backdrop of the U.S.-led boycott of the 1980 summer Olympics in Moscow, the boycott to protest the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan. Also in the background that year was the Iran hostage crisis in which Iran held 52 Americans after Iranian college students seized the United States embassy. On March 24, Archbishop of El Salvador Oscar Romero, spokesman for justice, was murdered while celebrating a Mass. On May 17, four Florida police officers were acquitted of the manslaughter of Arthur McDuffie, triggering the deadliest race

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riots in decades. The next day, Mount St. Helens erupted, a sign of the times. On May 29, a white supremacist shot civil rights activist Vernan Jordan. He survived and became the subject of the first story on the new Cable News Network. On June 10, a United Airlines executive opened a package in the mail and it exploded. He suffered burns and cuts, becoming the fourth victim of "the Unabomber." On September 26 in Munich, West Germany, a bombing killed a dozen people and injured more than 200 others at Oktoberfest. On December 2, members of the El Salvador National Guard raped and murdered three Catholic nuns and a missionary, on December 8 an angry Beatles fan murdered John Lennon, and on Christmas Eve, the Supreme Commander of the German Nazi Navy died unrepentant.

In 1980, computers had yet to infiltrate, permeate and remake people's lives the way the telephone and television had changed earlier generations. Computers were mostly massive cable-tethered workplace affairs in places such as law firms and newspaper newsrooms. It was a marvel to send a message across a room and to store data on a floppy plastic disk. Home computers, personal computers and portable computers didn't exist. A mouse was a small unwelcome rodent. Computers were the antithesis of user-friendly, a phrase that didn't exist. The Internet on a broad scale was years away.

Technical innovations led to innovation in entertainment. The latest Star Wars movie, *The Empire Strikes Back*, rife with eye-popping, state-of-the-art special effects, came out on May 21. In bars and arcades, video games replaced pinball machines and became increasingly colorful and sophisticated. Pong gave way to Asteroids gave way to Space Invaders and Galaxian and then, gobbling the competition, came PacMan.

Millions of Americans watched TV. Their biggest question was, "who shot J.R.?" Staying inside their boxes, seeing less and less of their neighbors, too many Americans considered themselves free from responsibility for others.

In 1980, an economic recession was underway. The federal deficit was nearly double the 1979 deficit. Inflation and unemployment were up. Up higher, the United States' unmanned spacecraft Voyager closed in on Saturn, extending humanity's reach into the solar system. The entire universe was expanding.

Of the universe, planets, technology, tragedies and politics, the characters in these fictions knew little and cared less. They could count the population of their worlds on one hand, and they had all they could do to get by each day. Their worlds, ever so small, loomed ever so much larger than everything else. What did they do in those worlds? In the jargon of literature, what are the plots and how are they structured?

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Taken whole or individually, the structure of these fictions can be perplexing and thus frustrating, for what we don't understand, what doesn't fit our expectations, frustrates us. How, then, to make sense of what happens?

First, these tales have not been written sequentially and needn't be read sequentially. Second, some of these fictions are miniature stories with recognizable plots, but others are narrative events, not stories, while other of these fictions are miniature stories with recognizable plots. Third, the conventional understanding of plot - rising action, conflict, climax, falling action and resolution - sometimes fails. In that conventional plot, events are points on a two-dimensional line. Leo Tolstoy was a master, weaving multiple plot lines (*Anna Karenina*, *War and Peace*) and plot lines that cross like the letter X (*The Death of Ivan Ilych*).

Problematical for convention, however, is that plot, rather than a knotted line with a starting point that rises, falls and closes with a *denouement*, can be a pendulum tracing an arc between extremes, a rousing ride through contrasts and ironies. Narrow ties, wide ties. Long skirts, short skirts. Long hair, short hair. Hair of different colors. No hair. Mustache or no mustache, beard or no beard, short sideburns, long sideburns. Oh, if life were that simply bifurcated and clear! What vanity of plot vanities!

But events don't occur as stand-alone, one-at-a-time happenings, first this, then this, then this, *seriatim*, nor to they occur in dualities, swing like a pendulum, or float like flotsam one way down a river that twists and turns and changes course.

Instead, plot lines may not simply swing back and forth, but events might be told backwards. The structure may be "falling action, rising action" or "falling action, action falling," "bass-ackwards" if you will, or a chiasma. Events might be backwards, ideas might be backwards, and sometimes just sentences are backwards. Read "just sentences" to mean both "only sentences" and also to mean "fair sentences." Like this sentence . . . stupid king sofa I'm. Read that backwards. It's a foul, unfair sentence. In the history of jurisprudence, there have been countless unfair sentences.

Alternatively, the arc could be a full arc which the characters traverse in either direction or circle back on themselves. On that circle, beginnings and endings lose their distinctions. Or think three dimensionally, not of a circle but of a ball. Picture the ball spinning. Picture events in a spiral, forming or breaking up, ever tightening or ever loosening. Imagine Brownian motion.

When events occur dynamically, randomly and simultaneously, when contemporaneous events deny easy and peaceful assembly, plot in these tales is *current*, not in the sense of flow but in the sense of *now* and *here*. "Now here" and "no where" are almost the same, the difference only a small space in an adjacent location. Events are *concurrent*, "with

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current" - with now. When all time is contemporary, time can stand still. It may be said, paradoxically, that in the fullness of time, time does not exist. As Codell imagines in "The woman in the dumpster," the sun reverses course in the sky and we remember our future. As we can plan our past. That is the iridescent beauty of fiction.

Whatever the structure of events in these fictions, you'll find symbols galore. Like clothes hangers and paperclips, symbols are ubiquitous, yet you may not notice them until you look for them. To the objection "that doesn't mean anything!", the writer responds that in literature, like in religion, everything means something. The smallest detail may be ambiguous. A rose is a rose, a weed is a weed, a window is a window - until it whispers something else.

Symbols, plot, setting, characters; put them all together and you may discover themes. What does each tale signify? Taken together, do they mean anything at all? Like William Carlos Williams' "The Red Wheelbarrow," so much depends on the details. Sylvia Plath had it right: "[t]he artist's life nourishes itself on the particular, the concrete: . . . that's where the magic mountains begin." Meaning grows in an inductive process and can differ from person to person. For those reasons, dear reader, I leave the meaning of these fictions to you.

These fictions. The word "fiction" occurs so many times. The common understanding is that "fiction" means false, but nothing can be further from the truth. By all means available to a writer, fiction can convey truth despite, and *because*, its details and dialogue are imagined. A better word for much of fiction is "faction," something that chooses sides, something that looks objective but isn't, like those "based on a true story" books and movies that include the facts that they want, not the facts as they were. Faction isn't factual; it's merely based on facts. Call them "ficts."

What, then, is truth? Is truth self-evident, as Thomas Jefferson purported in the preamble to the Declaration of Independence, "that all men are created equal"?

What truth is, is that it's fraught with difficulties. Explaining a self-evident truth contradicts the whole notion that truth is self-evident. It's boot-strapping, a circular argument, another chiasma. It's self-evident because it's true; it's true because it's self-evident. And if all men are created equal (a debatable premise), they don't stay equal for very long. And what about people who aren't male? What about people who, once upon a time, weren't legally people? Slaves, terrorists and mob rule may be citizens, patriots and republicrats, and vice versa.

No, far from self-evident, truth can be absurd, fantastic, elusive and inconstant, hamstrung in hindsight by subjectivity. What one's contemporaries consider truth, time may not. Time will have its erosive way. As for me and mine, I emulate the great

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essayist Michel de Montaigne: "I speak the truth, not to the full, but as much as I dare." My reward has been the intoxication of creativity. In creating, I'm a happy prisoner of my own imagination.

Last, an apology. Be you tender and innocent or not, I pray for your patience and pardon if you encounter in my imaginings any roughness, sordidness, crass sentiments or words that offend. They belong to the events, the city, and the time, all of which are my duty to set forth plainly, with or without contrivance, remaining as faithful to the characters as a good editor remains faithful to the voice of a writer. Literature and the Holy Books themselves stretch across cultures and generations, their words not buried by the sands of time but boiling to the surface, time-honored living words that provide an escape into life for those willing to face it.

So must I reach to you, dear reader, in the hope that we rise above the incessant, dulling hum of life's daily indignities and atrocities. In my efforts I am and always will be less perfect than any sentient creature, so that the defects in these fictions are solely the result of the deficits of their Creator. For what I lack in wit, may I make up with wisdom. For what I lack in wisdom and for the multitude of other shortcomings, I beg your empathy and forgiveness.

/s/ your most humble servant, the author.

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