

O Dio Che Bella: A Novella Project

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Abstract

The question—what happens to emotionally repressed, distracted, detached, freedom-loving Anglo-North American visitors who come to Italy and actually encounter the alleged freedom that Italy offers?—is examined by means of research-creation—fiction writing: in the form of a novella, a synthesis of major GLS themes—combining artistic expression and scholarly investigation using a bricolage method of constructing objects from everyday materials by quoting from and alluding to texts: including the Prometheus Myth, Freud, and Mudford, and seventy others from GLS course syllabi. Part one shows the disorienting influence of Italian culture on the tourist; part two shows the effect of this on the visitor's memory—seeking refuge in the everyday in thought and action can't prevent the assault of the past on the present, and by the end the visitor's interior world is radically changed. Theoretical influences on the novella are discussed in the preceding Statement of Intent.

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Statement of Intent

This project, an annotated novella, grew out of three sources: a) a short story submitted as a project for summer 2016's LS 819 travel study course—Italy in the Ancient and Modern Imagination, b) the readings I undertook for a summer 2017 directed reading course on the form and scope of the novella, and c) subsequent readings of GLS written and verbal texts since the fall of 2015. The novella is set in Italy because it grew out of my experiences in Italy during LS 819 and out of a playful hope of nudging my way into conversation with other texts in the canon of narratives starting with those from the Grand Tour and continuing to the present day. I wanted to create a work about a character whose life is changed by his visit to Italy. In this novella, protagonist Peter Stone is subject to anxiety and he resists examining possible causes of this, which reside in his past. What follows are a summary and rationale of sources of engagement for this project, a summary and rationale for my working method, and an overview of events in the plot of the novella.

Major Sources of Engagement

Peter Mudford, *Memory and Desire: Representations of Passion in the Novella*

In terms of the form of this work, Peter Mudford, in *Memory and Desire: Representations of Passion in the Novella*, speaks about the attributes of the novella: desire with absence, a web of forgetting and remembering—a deluded main character succumbing to motives not transparent.¹ The protagonist is powerfully narcissistic,² searching for the unmet other in himself and yet is hindered by lack of awareness and indifference.³ We see all of this in the callous unconcern Stone shows toward those who would be close to him. Mudford asserts that in the novella events isolate the character who is gripped by a desire for a self-transcendence marked by extreme states of feeling seen through belated moments of lucidity.⁴ In Part Two of this novella, Stone is isolated

1 See Mudford, p. 2.

2 Ibid, p. 5.

3 Ibid, p. 18.

4 Ibid, p. 26.

in Bologna and in his agitation is compelled to experience memories of his forgotten past. Memory is perhaps important to many characters in fiction, but given the significant role of memory in Stone's life, the novella is the most appropriate form with which to explore it in this project.

Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*

The city of Rome and the role of memory are two elements at the heart of this novella: much of this story takes place in Rome and protagonist Peter Stone is troubled by both memories he doesn't realize he has, and memories he doesn't want to experience. Memory is about both time and place. In *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Freud discusses the physical and temporal topography of Rome in relation to those aspects of the mind.⁵ Rome is a place not just of history but also of memory. And just as the physical Roman ruins of various historic periods are accessible to us today, so are our memories of times past. Freud asserts that "In mental life nothing which has once been formed can perish...everything is somehow preserved."⁶ He briefly discusses excavated sections of the Servian Wall.⁷ And during his absent-minded exploration of the Forum where the earth allows the past to re-emerge, Stone begins to experience something of an unwitting and unwilling excavation of his memories. I set Peter Stone's place of birth and childhood residence in the city of Vancouver in South Vancouver's Fraserview Heights Neighbourhood. He regards this neighbourhood as recently established in comparison to Rome. And in this environment, it is as if his memories are as temporally remote as the Etruscan ruins of Rome, and locked in a place as cold, arid, and remote as the floor of an ocean trench: and in his visit to the Forum, it is as if in ancient Rome Peter has discovered a heat vent, an upwelling and life-giving source around which life, and memories, can thrive.

The Prometheus Myth, using Aeschylus's *Prometheus Bound*

In "Ulysses, Order, and Myth," TS Eliot discusses using myth in fiction to "manipulate the continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity...to give a shaped significance to the anarchy of contemporary history."⁸ I used a myth to help

5 See Freud, p. 296.

6 Ibid, p. 295.

7 Ibid, p. 296.

8 See Eliot, p. 130.

shape this novella, which traverses, for the frequently disoriented protagonist, back and forth between past and present.

PB Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* discussed in the LS 819 course readings led me to use the *Prometheus Bound* of Aeschylus as a major source for this novella. Aeschylus's figure of Io, transformed into a cow, stung and pursued by a gadfly, is one model after which I build my protagonist. In the novella, Peter Stone encounters cows transposed as vocabulary in an Italian language exercise, a brand name, and the figure of an ornamental doorstop. In Shelley's retelling, which refers to Prometheus's future torment, the eagle's beak is dipped in Jupiter's poisonous saliva. Io's stinging in the Aeschylus play and Prometheus's poisoning as discussed in association with the Shelley text relate to Peter Stone's suffering from cellulitis as a result of an insect bite in this novella. Other elements link the novella to the Prometheus myth as well.

In the Aeschylus play, the earth shakes; in the novella, the earth shakes from an earthquake, which occurs in central Italy. Some of the novella takes place at Bologna's Piazza Maggiore, home of the Fountain of Neptune, Neptune the Roman counterpart to the Greek god Poseidon, god of earthquakes. In the Aeschylus play, Hephaestus is the sympathetic worker who fastens Prometheus to a rock. In the Christian myth wherein the crucifixion plays such an important role, Joseph of Arimathea—featured in Niccolò del' *Arca's Compianto sul Cristo Morto*, the statue Stone encounters at the end of the novella—is the sympathetic worker who unfastens the crucified Jesus, fastened to a wooden cross. In the Aeschylus play, Prometheus foretells the downfall of Zeus and the Olympians and the rise of the human race. Similarly, the story of Christ's martyrdom—as told in the *Compianto* (and elsewhere)—provides the impetus for the decline of Rome's Pantheon of gods and the rise of Christianity's new, and presumably, more democratizing and humanist order.

In terms of plot, hapless Peter Stone's meal of fennel relates to Prometheus's bringing of fire—a coal wrapped in a fennel bulb—to the helpless race of humans. The anatomy and physiology metaphors, which I hope have a cohering effect in the narrative, can perhaps be understood in relation to Prometheus's giving the human race its understanding of medicine. The name Peter Stone, which plays on the pun on the name of Peter in the Gospels, whom Jesus says will be the rock upon which the church is

grounded, can perhaps be seen as related to the rock upon which Prometheus is fastened.

Aeschylus's *Prometheus Bound*, and other elements of the Prometheus myth, is along with the statue: del' Arca's *Compianto*, the core written text source for the novella. And during the process of thinking about a persona for my narrator, I settled on the figure of Prometheus himself. Prometheus is of course a character in Aeschylus's play. But his primary role in the play is not that of an agent who moves the drama forward, but as a storyteller. There is little drama between Prometheus and the other characters he meets as he hangs on his rock. He functions mostly as a storyteller. He tells his story to Oceanus, Hephaestus, the Chorus, and Io. In the novella, Prometheus is in a sense not just telling the story of Peter Stone to the reader but telling it to the other characters in *Prometheus Bound* as well.

I chose him as the narrator in part because he is all knowing. His omniscience extends not just to all literal events in past, present, and future time and space but all of literary history, too. Prometheus is thus an ideal figure to be quoting from and alluding to several dozen texts in the nearly two gross of notes that help to build the novella. He is not the anguished, unfairly punished victim crying out at the injustice of his predicament at the end of the play but rather a calm and reassuring figure: he gives Io counsel reminding her that her sufferings will eventually pass; he alleviates Hephaestus's worry, telling him not to be troubled in his role in Prometheus's torment, and he assuages the Chorus, outraged at the indignity of his suffering. In the novella, Prometheus is also the wry, mocking figure who in the play reminds Hermes, despite the messenger's bullying, that Zeus and all the gods will one day fall away to be replaced by something else.

Niccolò del' Arca's *Compianto sul Cristo Morto*, with notes from Campanini and Samaritani

The Santa Maria della Vita cathedral, home of the *Compianto*, which Peter Stone visits at the end of the novella, is the site of a former hospital, a place devoted to health care. The world of Peter Stone in the story is in many ways filled with ideas about health care and health issues. Peter's father Robert is a civil servant in the British Columbia government's Ministry of Health, and Peter and his friend John work in a drug store and pharmacy. In the 15th Century, the *Compianto* gave meaning to the lives of people whose relatives were patients—who were sick and sometimes died. At the end of the

novella, this work deeply affects Peter Stone, who is sick with an infection himself, and he sees in the mourners over Christ's body specific loved ones with whom he's squandered the opportunities for satisfying and meaningful personal relationships. The Santa Maria della Vita cathedral is important not just in terms of health care but also as the site of a place of worship.

One of the most pronounced markers of Peter Stone's arrested development as a result of painful early life events—his grandmother's premature death, his father's exit from the family home, his mother's withdrawal from her son's life—is Peter's disavowal of his parents' church during adolescence. This isn't just teen rebellion however. The act of leaving the church and his embracing of an uninformed and emotionally arid atheism cauterizes his emotions and makes providing for his own and others' relational needs thereafter almost impossible. The encounter with the terra cotta *Compianto* in the church setting perhaps makes it possible for this stony protagonist to soften a little.

Other Major Written and Verbal Sources

1) Texts about Italy—from LS 819, 800, 801

a) Texts about Travelers to Italy: fiction, poetry, belles lettres—Mann, H. James, the Shelleys, and the Brownings

The trio of Cathy, her new friend Matthias, and Peter perhaps look very much like Daisy, Giovanelli, and Winterbourne of Henry James's novella *Daisy Miller*. Cathy is as open to the Italian experience as Daisy Miller is; Matthias offers Cathy a relationship within which to explore this as much as Giovanelli does for Daisy; and Peter seems every bit the rule-defying killjoy as Winterbourne does as the mouthpiece of constraining social mores and erstwhile participation in cavalier relationships in Henry James's novella. *Death in Venice* is also important. Thomas Mann's Gustave (von) Aschenbach is at turn impatient with visitors and locals in Italy, longing for something unattainable, and perilously sick. Although it seems that his own sickness (his anxieties, and his infection and fever) is unlikely to become a sickness unto death, Peter Stone's disinclination to engage with locals and other visitors to Italy and his own directionless longings perhaps relate him closely to Aschenbach. And Stone's lust for Internet stardom is as hollow as Aschenbach's empty fame-seeking literary ambitions. The Brownings and the Shelleys provide much of the source material about art and culture in

Italy in the novella. Stone's published thoughts about his little trip are in some ways an abject parody of MS Shelley's and EB Browning's sincere expressions, in poetry and belles lettres, about the visitor's experience in Italy.

b) Theoretical Texts on Italy: Scappettone, Pater, McCarthy

Jennifer Scappettone's work in *Killing the Moonlight* provides much of the source material for the conflict-ridden exchanges between Peter and Cathy; Pater's work, especially on Michelangelo, provides a lot of source material for the tour guides' lectures, which Stone finds so irritating; and McCarthy's criticism of the Florence experience provides source materials for one of Peter's blog postings.

c) Older Italian and Roman Texts: Machiavelli, Seneca, and Dante

I especially wanted some of Machiavelli's extravagant and humorous articulations related to his sincere hopes for Italian unity and nationhood to inform some of Peter Stone's ill-considered blog postings. Seneca's meditations on the art of living are similarly displaced into the words of the protagonist. And no meditation of the traveler's experience in Italy would be complete without some reference to Dante.

d) Lectures in the classroom and in the field

Articulations made in lectures by Professor Sasha Colby, tour guides Paolo Bultrini and Alessandro Guidi, and others provide a lot of source material about art and culture in Italy.

2) Other Topics—from SAR 891, LS 811, LS 800

GLS texts from LS 811 deal with themes of apocalypse. I wanted to use LS 811 material from Eliot, Didion, Orwell, and others to inform Peter Stone's dysphoria—in a sense a personal apocalypse—with his solitary situation in, what are for him, these unfamiliar settings in Italy.

From SAR 891, the works on existentialism from Barrett, Camus, and Sartre also help to build the novella. They help to position Peter Stone as a character situated within the milieu of Anglo-North American culture so at odds with the European world view as expressed in these texts. These texts help animate a character who is self-conscious but

knows little about himself,⁹ who valorizes absence over presence,¹⁰ whose mind is divorced from his life,¹¹ and who has the technological powers of Prometheus available to him, but is powerless to see (unlike Prometheus himself) that he has succumbed to the disaster of pride.¹²

Also from SAR 891, the work of Davis, Connerton, and Malpas about walking in the city and other places provides material to help portray a character who gradually comes to understand the importance of walking and pilgrimage.

The poetry of Rumi, Sappho, and Catullus provides source material to depict the vicissitudes of love and Peter's struggles to create and maintain satisfying and lasting relationships with Cathy, Linda, and others.

Erazim Kohák and Ron Rindo provide several ideas on the nature of sickness and health as Peter Stone struggles quixotically (without the help of antibiotics) to deal with his spreading infection and fever.

3) Miscellany from LS 800/801—Religion, Art, Music, Travel, and Personal Readings

Descartes's and Lucretius's articulations on science and the natural world are used by Stone in his blogs in bigoted praise of logic and condemnation of religion.

Montaigne and De Botton provide material used in Cathy's and Peter's exchanges about the nature of travel.

Musicologist Donald J. Grout provides the framework for Matthias's articulations about the counterpoint of 16th century composer Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina.

Readers of this novella might be interested in Peter Stone's relationship to digital social media and may speculate on its ability to enhance or erode the social contract. I unfortunately haven't done much formal reading about this, but Ellen Rose's discussions related to the social media moment helped lead me to the idea of including a traveler's

⁹ See Barrett, p. 23.

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 3.

¹¹ Ibid, p. 9.

¹² Ibid, p. 65.

blog as part of the novella. Bauman and Donskis's *Moral Blindness* is not cited here, but it also gave me much to think about.

Regarding the scene in which Carol Stone confronts her son about his use of pornography: it's not mentioned formally in the bibliography or notes, but I'm aware that something similar exists in a scene in Russell Banks's 2011 *The Lost Memory of Skin*. Similarly, the Prometheus narrator's references to "sweet sleep," "the eyes drenched in sleep," etc., obvious references to Homer's *Odyssey* and other ideas related to the pantheon of gods and heroes, are not cited formally. I felt that these are so much a part of commonly held public knowledge that no citations would be necessary.

Method and Rationale

Research and Creation

This novella is the major work completed for LS 999, the MA Project course toward the completion of an academic degree. It has been generated through what SSRHC defines as "research-creation."¹³ Its method of creation combines artistic expression and scholarly investigation using both creative and research practices. "The creation process is situated within the research activity and produces critically informed work in a variety of media."¹⁴ This method of research-creation has helped me to produce this novella, and this process has resulted in the development of new knowledge. In its narrative form, it is knowledge accessible to scholarly and lay readers alike.

The Separation of Protagonist and Narrating Voice

I employ a third-person narrator in this fictive work. The narrator is often sardonic in his telling of the reality of protagonist Peter Stone's life. There is a separation between the narrating voice and the fumbling progress of Peter Stone. The blog allows Stone to speak for himself. And the "double vision" permitted by using two intermittently changing narrators provides a strong contrast and helps to show just how deluded the protagonist is. The trip to Italy is one frame through which the story is told. It separates the protagonist from his native geography. The blog is another frame through which the

¹³ See the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Definitions of Terms page.

¹⁴ Ibid.

story is told. It is a flimsy public façade: it separates Peter Stone from who he really is, from a more mature understanding of himself.

What follows is a discussion of my method and rationale regarding the making of this novella from source texts.

The Bricolage Method

In film, the word “montage” is used; in art, the word “mosaic.” Elsewhere we see the term “pastiche.” I don’t have a background in the theory of any of these, but I prefer to call what I do here in this novella “bricolage.” In her discussion of bricolage, Anna Dezeuze defines the method as “evoking a do-it-yourself process of constructing objects ... from everyday materials.”¹⁵ In my use of quotation from works of the canon, I have no wish to assign them the negative qualities with which we commonly associate the mundane and everyday. But the everyday is important in this novella. Even in his desire for transcendence, Peter Stone can’t escape the mundane. It helps him make sense of his new and strange environment. Everyday actions and patterns of language help him adapt to the requirements of social order. And the delight he takes in such mundane tasks as grooming and housework help him try to overcome the oppression he feels—with both his new surroundings and his unwanted memories.

Dezeuze states that these everyday materials are “discarded and purloined rather than new.”¹⁶ The quotations I use to build the novella are certainly not new. On the other hand, I don’t feel that the source works I use are superfluous. And I certainly hope that my use of them will be perceived as an act of celebration rather than appropriation. But if the tone with which the narrator and characters use the quotations seems at times rather jocular, I hope it will at least be perceived as respectful.

The construction process of bricolage, according to Dezeuze, involves not assembling but the act of sculpting.¹⁷ Through the process of revising and editing, writers of fiction perhaps hope to achieve the almost unattainable burnished quality of a finished sculpture in their work. If the quality of this novella lacks the polish of a sculpture, I at least hope to make a connection between the bricolagic process of sculpting and the del’

¹⁵ The notes for this brief discussion are found in the preview of the article.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

Arca sculpture so important to the novella. Finally, Dezeuze writes about the bricoleur speaking “*through* things as well as with them....”¹⁸ The word “through” implies more than just one direction. I’m using quotations to help build this project and these works do animate the novella, but I hope that this practice is not just one of appropriation. Rather I hope that the reader will be pleased to see ideas from these works transposed as they are in the novella and that this pleasure will lead the reader back to further readings of these original source texts. The idea of the past reaching through to the present through works of art was a central idea in LS 819 and is embodied in this novella in the character of Peter Stone’s traveling companion Cathy.

My use of bricolage as a method of helping me to write grew out of my readings of and about Ezra Pound’s “Canto VIII.” My interest in the assembling of other texts to create a new one resulted in my project for LS 819, the short story upon which this novella is built. The novella is a creative project, but the fictive world it hypothesizes is largely constructed from and sturdily grounded in the study of literary and discursive texts encountered (most of them in GLS courses) since the fall of 2015. My interest in the assembling of other texts to create a new one developed during my study of Eliot’s “The Waste Land” during LS 811. During the process of writing, I tried to let the narrative of Peter’s story be guided by the notes I took based on the texts and lectures I encountered.

I can’t claim to have a strong understanding of Pound or Eliot, but I became attracted to the fragmentation and juxtapositions in some of their work and I wanted to unify a chorus of fragmented voices in my own work. The texts used to create the novella and the themes that may arise for its reader connect this project to academic conventions. The over 250 notes from the almost seventy written and verbal sources are woven into the novella as exposition, narrative, scene, and dialogue. These notes, in the form of quotations from and allusions to the texts in the body of this project, serve to connect this fictive work to the scholarly traditions to which these texts belong.

The numbered notes may distract the reader from the novella as a work of fiction, but for the purpose of this novella as part of the work done toward gaining an academic degree, the numbers will lead the reader to footnotes referring to the source texts. The

¹⁸ Ibid.

result is hopefully a synthesis of and robust connection to the themes of exile and anguish encountered in GLS courses.

I hope that the sources used to inform it—this literature of Graduate Liberal Studies literature¹⁹—chosen and employed to create it, are composed in such a manner as to hold this work together. And I hope that they are arranged in such a way as to help depict adequately the fragmented, “chance broken bundle of mirrors”²⁰ of protagonist Peter Stone’s experience in traveling through the cities he visits in Italy.

Plot Timeline

What follows is a table outlining, for the busy reader, some events in the novella’s narrative.

Page Numbers	Time in Story	Event in Story	Back-story	Peter’s Blog Topics
1	Day Eight			On My Own
2		On the train to Bologna		
3			Peter and Cathy meet (Peter is 32)	
5			Peter and Cathy together	
7			Preparing for their trip	
9	Day One	Traveling to Rome		
12				The Flights
13	Day Two	In Rome at the Borghese		
14			At Church (Peter is 10)	
15		At the Borghese		
16				Religion
17	Day Three	In the Pincio		
18			Conflict with Mother (Peter is 15)	
19		At the Vatican Museum		
20				Food
21			Leaving Home (Peter is 18)	
22	Day Four	Peter on his way to the Forum		
23		At the Forum		
24			Former Girlfriends (Peter in his 20s)	
25		At Dinner		
27		At a Concert		

¹⁹ Conrad Aiken says that Eliot makes a “literature of literature.”

²⁰ Aiken uses these terms to describe Eliot’s work in *The Waste Land*.

Page Numbers	Time in Story	Event in Story	Back-story	Peter's Blog Topics
29				The Forum
30			Work Life (Peter in his 20s)	
32	Day Five	At a Rome hospital		
33		In a Venice hotel		
34		Dinner in Venice		
36				Venice
37	Day Six	Florence: Museo del Duomo		
37	Day Seven	The Uffizi		
38		Galleria dell' Accademia		
39			In Japan (Peter is 30)	
40				Florence
42	Day Eight	Peter and Cathy at parting		
43		Arriving in Bologna		
44		The courtyard		
45		Trouble with the keys		
46		At a film		
47				Disappointed in Italy
48			Parents Divorce (Peter is 11)	
48		In his room		
49			The Surprise Party (Peter is 30)	
50			Peter falling out with his friend John	
51		The Dream		
52	Day Nine	Waking up in his Room		
52			No charm (Peter is a young child)	
53		The earthquake		
54		At the language school		
55		Shamed on the Internet		
55			Peter's grandmother dies (Peter is 8)	
56		Messages in the Kitchen		
57			Peter's Girlfriend Linda is Pregnant (Peter is 31)	
57		Cleaning		
58			Linda's miscarriage	
58		No English		
60			Linda leaves Peter	
61		At the supermarket		
63		Falling asleep at the park		
63		In bed		
64		Taking a bath		
66	Day Ten	Waking up		

Page Numbers	Time in Story	Event in Story	Back-story	Peter's Blog Topics
67		Grooming		
68		Peter breaks his phone		
69		Walking: the porticoes		
72		Woman outside the church		
73		In the Santa Maria della Vita		
74		In front of the Compianto		

Table 1: Events in the Story and Back-story of the Narrative

The “O Dio Che Bella” Song as Objective Correlative

Readers may assign importance to whatever ideas they see fit, but I want to underscore one that I found meaningful during my work on this project, which is embodied in the words “O Dio, che bella.” The fictive song, “O Dio Che Bella,” presented in the novella, grew out of my experience with reading during LS 819 a March 1819 letter from MW Shelley to Maria Gisbourne. In the letter Shelley describes her young son William with them in Italy, who exclaims “O Dio, che bella” whenever he’s pleased with something he sees. Peter Stone encounters this song in four places in the narrative: it’s on the radio in a taxi from the Rome Airport; he watches a video of it near the Pincio in Rome; he reads the lyrics of it near the Forum; and he and Cathy encounter a busker singing it in St. Mark’s Square in Venice. Each time he hears this song, Peter experiences, almost against his will, a greater and greater sense of happiness. In using the repeated articulations of the words “O Dio che bella” as an objective correlative (and in assigning it as this work’s title) I wanted to let the novella be illuminated by the obvious delight that MW Shelley expresses regarding her son, and to honour the grief, expressed in subsequent letters, at the boy’s death in Italy at four years of age.

Part One

“Greetings from Signor Lonely”

“Slight change of plan here. For better or worse, I’m afraid to say, I’m going to be enjoying the final three days of this little venture on my own. But don’t cry for me readers: I probably deserve some time in solitary. The friend I came here with wanted a little more from me on this trip than I was able to provide. Bologna: not exactly my first choice. Not my choice at all, in fact. I’ll admit I don’t really get the local populace. They seem nice, very sincere actually, but totally lacking irony.²¹ People say I’m tone deaf, and maybe I am, but I’m trying to make the best of a bad situation here. I can do this. And the knowledge that you’re here along for the ride, dear readers, gives aid and comfort to me. For that I thank you, all five of you. And you can rest assured, ladies and gentlemen, that when I get to Bologna, I am going to see it. Whatever attractions there may be, I will visit them; I will be informed. I will investigate. Dumped, alone again, keeping bad company. Han Solo flying solo—no matter. I am resolved. All will be well. And that’s a stone ginger.”

And this was true. Our protagonist had been a poor traveling companion, just awful. But what could he do? After all, you can’t get blood from a stone. So he put a brave face on it. Up until then, the life of Peter Stone seemed to be as sterile, as banal, as laborious, as any I’d ever encountered.²² Midway on his life’s journey—no not midway, just on the epidermis of middle age, the experience of life for Peter Stone, as he was finally starting to learn, was rather like a bolus of bitter medicine that was proving difficult to swallow.²³ Peter regarded the scenery before him. To Peter, the farms between Florence and Bologna were tidy²⁴ but no more attractive than those he’d seen before.²⁵ He was free now, free at last, and responsible to no one but himself. The

²¹ In her April 1, 2016 lecture, Professor Colby pointed to notions of irony in Italian society.

²² “Sterile, banal, and laborious” are from Flaubert, here quoted by De Botton in *The Art of Travel* (p. 151).

²³ Cf: Dante’s famous first words from *The Divine Comedy* (*The Inferno*, p. 1).

²⁴ During his April 29, 2016 lecture, Professor Garfinkle stated that Bologna is much tidier than the whole of Italy really is.

²⁵ James writes of the town of Vevey, where Winterbourne is temporarily residing in Switzerland, feeling like the provincial United States (Daisy Miller, p. 3). Correspondingly, Peter Stone grew up in a sleepy, essentially suburban, part of South Vancouver.

kilometres sped past with the fields. He began to feel sleepy with the rocking of the train and to keep himself awake, he reviewed the post he'd written the previous evening.

For a few moments, Peter felt exhilarated. There would be some tough times ahead for him. But he wouldn't have to worry about that for a few days. The minutes and seconds slowed. These increments of time spread before him like an eternity. He had problems and he made a languid note to self of this. But for now he had time. He took another look at the passing fields outside. He was rich in time. He had acres of it.

Splashing water on his face in the train washroom, Peter found himself in a less than sanguine frame of mind. He ran his hands through his hair, licked his fingers, smoothed his eyebrows. He rubbed at the freckles dotting his nose. A mole he'd never seen before had appeared on his neck.

Returning from the restroom, he came across a small group of young men crowding a vestibule between two cars. They didn't have tickets. A uniformed official was filling out a form. Peter paused a moment glancing at their tired faces. A woman who worked for the railway, her face soft, was talking to the youngest of them, a worried looking lad in his teens. As Peter squeezed past he heard her ask in English whether they were okay: did they need blankets, would they like something to eat.

But as with the other people he'd squeezed past in his life, Peter didn't have time for them; they may as well have been figures in a painting. He was alone again. It was time for him to look at where he'd come from, how he'd got here—examine his weak spots, the tender areas, the fractures that had always been.²⁶ He'd been through separations before: his father, his past girlfriends, his mother and sister. This was nothing. For a moment he was optimistic. Maybe this change of scenery would help? He doubted it. Travel doesn't help you, he reasoned in silence, so long as you're traveling with yourself.²⁷ He delicately touched the angry red mark that had appeared, as if from nowhere on the back of his left thigh four days earlier.

In the mid-distance, Peter saw a solitary cow in the field swishing its tail. The animal looked at him as the train passed. Peter felt the familiar tightening in his

²⁶ See Malpas regarding the violence in the silences in the grand narratives of modernity, p. 131.

²⁷ A change of scenery doesn't free us from care. Travel doesn't improve you so long as you're traveling with your self (Montaigne, p. 4).

diaphragm, the ringing in his ears. And as the good old adrenaline and cortisol did their usual thing, he felt that he was disappearing. He was gone, absent from the lives of everyone he'd known. And no one would miss him.²⁸ He was back to his perpetual beginning,²⁹ always hoping to get, at last, a proper start in life. Everyone was moving ahead; he was always left behind, something always holding him back.³⁰

We begin our story one year earlier during the summer solstice party at which Peter and his former travelling companion Cathy first met. This event was at the home of a minor celebrity, an obnoxious C-lister from the local music scene who'd strutted his hour in the dives of Vancouver a generation ago. There was live music and Peter watched as a man played a Mexican tune on a guitar while two women handclapped in accompaniment, one with very nice hands, Peter noticed, on the offbeat. Peter was no musician, and he certainly wasn't looking for anything serious, but he told himself he was just coming off an especially bad breakup, and as he watched her hands, he thought that the progenitor of this brilliant show of syncopated percussion was just the kind of person who would do while he was on the rebound.

More out of curiosity and respect than anything else, but also being aficionados of music from the early nineties, the two hand-clappers approached the host in the hopes of speaking with him. Peter looked on, and to his dismay our host, this bushy-browed Caesar of the pre-internet era, much in his cups answered them in a manner that did little to diminish the reputation he'd cultivated in his prime. He'd been at the centre of a rapt cohort of flatterers, and displeased at being interrupted asked the girl with nice hands, in so many words and attaching an unkind (and unfair) epithet, to scram. She and her friend retreated a step or two away and considered their options.

Decency forbids me to—well not exactly forbids: what, after all, does decency forbid these days—let's say then that decency discourages me from repeating what she said but on her return, and prefacing her most salient point with the idea that the world of

²⁸ James plays with the idea of memory and disappearance with Daisy walking at the edge of the ceiling-door-only oubliettes (*Daisy Miller*, p. 31).

²⁹ In *Killing the Moonlight* Jennifer Scappettone writes about the presence of the past (Scappettone p. 109).

³⁰ Scappettone writes about the entanglement of memory, and the paralysis of precedent (Scappettone p. 127).

men could be compared to a forest, she asserted (in her arborist's view) that our host was a bonsai.

The wrinkles around Peter's blue eyes deepened as he laughed. His face and neck were both strangers to the razor. His teeth showed winningly when he smiled and not in that hideous gingival way, which Peter claimed to loathe in extroverts. As he laughed his left eye drooped in a manner that Cathy would later call "pleasingly asymmetrical." And now fired by an early evening (and afternoon) of drinking, his high cheekbones tended toward ruddiness in his unmistakably heart shaped face. Peter muttered something to the host, smiling and holding his hand out with convivial energy to shake the entertainer's hand. The former front man took it, unaccustomed to ignoring someone with such charisma.

Peter then stepped forward, cupped a hand around his mouth, and leaned down to whisper in the emperor's ear. Decency once again—oh, forget it: Peter told him that at his conception, the man's mother had achieved congress with a donkey. Peter was no wit and certainly not one to indulge in extended metaphor, but the Muses smile even on the dullest sometimes. Peter stepped back, and watching his listener's formidable eyebrows now closing in on each other, put his hands above his ears, and, continuing with his equine theme, stuck the teeth of his upper jaw out (but not in a gingival manner) and shouted, "Hee haw!" The first punch was a softy to the left side of his face, but Peter was knocked off balance by the second to his right eye. "Hee haw!" he said again, stumbling into the object of his hopes who fell backward with him onto the empty couch, his head in her lap, her hands in his hair.

Cathy standing reached the middle of Peter's forehead and in the glow of the late evening sunset, her hazel eyes turned toward green with feeling as she tended to his eye with a tissue. Peter appraised her Betty Page bangs and smelled her shoulder length auburn hair. The other hand clapper called a cab and the three of them waited, with our protagonist repeating that he wanted a steak for his eye. After dropping Cathy's friend off, he seemed to sober up a bit, and leaning around to speak to Cathy in the back seat looked meaningfully at her with his one open eye.

He praised her beauty and acknowledged that such a beauty as her must have had many suitors; he expressed condolences toward all of the fellows whose hearts she

must have broken. "... be that as it may, I must now ask you to forget those cavaliers of days gone by. I of course am much too modest a man to be considered one of your paramours. I'm sure that I'm not worthy of such affections as yours. But I am sincere."

"Ha," managed Cathy.

"I can offer you that," he continued. "Put aside, for now, all notions of your former conquests and put your faith in me." He gilded the withered lily of his crocodile's discourse, taking her phone and entering his contact information before returning it to her. Peter left Cathy standing outside her place on the street looking after his departing cab. He completed his player's tour de force leaning halfway out of the window of his door to blow her a kiss.

He visited her apartment weekend evenings, Cathy protecting the others for her work toward a degree in art history. On the living room wall, above the television, hung a framed print of Botticelli's *Venus*. He regarded it frequently sitting on the couch with her aged Airedale Merc, who submitted to his absentminded caresses as he waited for Cathy to get ready for whatever play, gallery, performance, lecture, or protest she'd planned for them. Tonight was no different. Peter stood up as Cathy came out of the bathroom wearing a towel. "I'll be ready in just a few minutes." Peter was overcome, and beheld her, not for the first time, with that imbecile's regard he reserved for Cathy—he'd actually reserved it for countless women, intimate and stranger alike—when he saw her in any state of undress. She went into the bathroom and shut the door. He sank back into his seat and returned his attention to the painting. Peter didn't know about the blood of Uranus. He didn't know about the sickle of Cronus, which formed into the foam and cloud from which she was born. In fact Peter had about as much interest in Venetian art as he did Venetian blinds, but there was something new in it for him each time he looked: the fabrics, the flowers, the wind from Zephyr's mouth.³¹ And what was that around the girl's neck, he thought, some kind of octopus scarf? Added to all of this, the foliage looked menacing, the background desolate. Peter tried to find it erotic but couldn't.

³¹ Pater writes of Botticelli's work being sympathetic to the complexity of the human condition (Pater, p. 87).

Peter hadn't expected to still be around by that point; but three months after they'd started seeing each other, Cathy introduced him to her eight-year-old son William. Ignoring his own past, Peter tended to regard all boys between the ages of five and fifteen as little more than aspiring armpit fart virtuosos. And Peter was unsure as to what form his role with the boy might take. They played soccer and computer games together, and finding William polite, quiet, and articulate (he'd heard him riff on Cathy's reference to the Republic of Rome with a quip about an American clothing and accessories retailer) Peter quickly declined to confer upon the boy membership in any kind of informal musician's guild. But Peter still bristled at the idea of forming a close relationship with another man's son.

After trying a few times, Cathy no longer asked Peter about his family. Of his past, he spoke in generalizations, talking frankly about what he called his "slow and difficult maturation," and about his eagerness to become a better person than his father. Unable to connect to his recent past,³² Peter tried to make light of it. He admitted that not long ago there had been someone named Linda. And he spoke of this Linda with such a precise and touching note of resignation and respect that Cathy could not help feeling impressed.

Cathy brought Peter on her trips to the Vancouver Art Gallery with William. He sat with them in front of paintings while they filled in pages of their sketchbooks. More than twenty minutes was tough for Peter. "How come we never get to see any of the good stuff? What's next from this guy's early period—finger paintings?"³³ Peter made a big and joking point of showing William not the artworks, but the escalators, the thermostats, the sprinklers and fire extinguishers. For a long time he thought he was having little influence but was won over from tip to toe at finding in William's open sketch book a few weeks later a drawing of a humidity sensor, complete with paper-roll, print out, and stylus.

During the term of her accelerated introduction to Italian, Cathy proposed that she and Peter travel to Italy together. "I'm thinking of this trip as a kind of

³² In her May 11, 2016 lecture, Professor Colby stressed the importance of breaking with the recent past to connect with the ancient past.

³³ In her lecture, and speaking of Walter Benjamin, Professor Colby said that character is revealed by his relationship to art (Colby, May 24, 2016).

reconnaissance mission. If all goes well, I might take a field study course, or a term abroad.” She took notes, a distracted intensity coming to her eyes as she looked up to recall some combination of vowel and diacritics during a writing exercise. Peter looked at her hand in its characteristic position, finger on her hairline, thumb on her cheekbone, a variation on the attitude of her hand while she did her pranayama exercises. “You should join me here. Studying together could be really good for us.”³⁴

“I’m no good at languages,” said Peter.

“I think you must be,” said Cathy dryly. “You’ve got quite a silver tongue.” Peter laughed but was content to watch her from time to time at the computer clicking images, repeating phrases, quietly celebrating with each trumpet fanfare audio clip that sounded at each correct answer.

They watched movies together, and although his tastes in film tended toward the more popular offerings of gangster and war cinema, Peter did agree to watch such classics as *La Dolce Vita* and *Cinema Paradiso* with Cathy. But she prevailed upon him to study with little effect. He looked at her monitor as she scrolled down from question to question. “No Signora. I can’t. It’s too terrible. The, uh, the interface, it’s too, *allora, una momento*, how you say, *inadequate*.” If Cathy was inclined to show some irritation at this he quelled it quickly, leaving the room, returning to Brando it up with an orange wedge in his mouth, convulsing in a sham stroke on the floor. When William started laughing, Peter leapt up and began marching around the living room shouting, “hup, hup!” before pausing, marching in one spot. He suddenly began singing the Italian national anthem: “*Fratelli d’Italia, L’Italia s’è desta*.” He continued, picking up Merc, marching then switching to a waltz with the dog—“*Dell’ elmo di Scipio S’è cinta la testa...*” Cathy looked at her son.

“What are we going to do with this guy?”

A week later, Peter arrived at her place to find Cathy studying not just with her laptop but also with a projector. The TV and Botticelli were gone and the bare living room wall was filled with text and image. “You’re enjoying this,” Peter said, stepping into the projector’s glow.

³⁴ In his lecture, Professor Duguid spoke of the Shelleys studying Latin and Greek together (Duguid, May 24, 2016).

“Una mucca,” she responded to the image on the screen. The week after that, Peter found her at the kitchen table filling small flashcards, just articles and nouns and verbs, hundreds of them, each in her lovely calligraphic hand, red on one side in English, green on the other in Italian with a fine sharpie. “You’re really good at this. Where’d you learn to do that?”

“You’re a hand fetishist,” said Cathy, ready for a break.

“You should teach me how to do that.”

“Hand pervert.” Peter took one of the pens and tried some of his decades out of practice cursive. In the week before their trip, Cathy covered three walls of her sparsely furnished yoga room in cards with green script.

Even if he wasn’t breaking any world records as a scholar, Cathy was pleased to learn of Peter’s interest in acting as their trip’s documentarian. She dissuaded him from taking video. “Why don’t you just keep a diary? There’s so much stuff online already.³⁵ The way to keep it really precious would be to write it all down by hand.”

“Ranting against technology is futile,” said Peter.³⁶ The entire enterprise was on the verge of collapse, Cathy despairing at Peter’s idea of bringing a drone with them, before they settled on a blog, agreeing on one post per day.

Cathy suggested a focus on food. Peter wanted to write about an international chain with franchises in each city. “We’re not going there,” said Cathy.

“Lots of Italian people go there. This would definitely generate a lot of traffic, get lots of hits; it could go viral.”

“Individuals have better taste than the public,”³⁷ said Cathy, longing for a better metaphor. “Why not try something else, like Fountains of Italy.”

³⁵ Barrett asserts that there is too much documentation today; all meaning is lost (Barrett, p. 23).

³⁶ Ranting against technology is futile and false (Kohák, p. 211).

³⁷ Cf. Individuals discover truths, not groups. (Descartes, p. 15).

“Let’s just keep it open. I have to see things before I can write about them.” Then in a conciliatory tone he said, “I could use a quotation in Italian at the top of each post. You could help me with that.”

“I don’t know. You should quote others only to improve your own work.”³⁸ Sitting on the couch, Peter typed on his new phone he’d be taking with them to Europe the next morning. He read what he’d written, nodded in approval, posted it, logged out, flipped the phone back and forth on his middle finger in the ring stand like a gunslinger, and put it away in his pocket. Later that night in bed, Cathy read his post:

“Concerning Our Upcoming Trip”³⁹ in which he promised to “meet and reason with others, to learn something about the local scene.”⁴⁰ She winced at his calling his blog their “Italian Fiesta,” his use of the word “epic” as a stand alone adjective, and his signing off with his gaming name he’d adopted many years ago.

On their flight, Peter and Cathy ate and talked about the days ahead in Rome. Her head was crammed with ideas about the Sistine Chapel. She spoke about the emotional neutrality of the *Pietà*,⁴¹ the iconography of the Trevi Fountain, the meaning-filled she-wolf in the Capitoline Museums.⁴² “What do you want to see while we’re there?” she asked. Peter, who had few ideas about Italy, and truth be told, would much rather have gone to some grassy desert oasis for golf,⁴³ struggled for a moment to find an appropriate response.

“The Colosseum,” he managed, a miraculous inspiration coming as he regarded the advertisement for the long-winded sword and sandals picture set in some neighbourhood of the Mediterranean, he supposed, history not being his strong subject, listed among the in-flight entertainments on the seatback screen in front of him. Cathy

³⁸ Cf. Quote others only to improve your work (Montaigne, p. 21).

³⁹ Cf. Concerning Various Kinds of Troops, and Especially Mercenaries (Machiavelli, p. 51).

⁴⁰ Cf. Travel to meet and reason with others to learn what’s true and what’s false (Descartes, p. 10).

⁴¹ In his May 23, 2016 lecture, Paolo Bultrini asserted that Michelangelo’s *Pietà* at St. Peter’s in Rome is emotionally neutral.

⁴² The image of Rome’s she-wolf nurturing Romulus and Remus is important in “Casa Guidi Windows” (EB Browning, p. 67).

⁴³ Cf. Mrs. Miller’s disdain of Rome and love of Zurich (*Daisy Miller*, p. xv).

wanted to plan for their days ahead. She spread a map of Rome before her with three highlighter pens. “It doesn’t always have to be so much work,” said Peter. “We’ve got a lot of free time over the next week. Why don’t we just go with the flow here. And look at all that paper. We can just GPS this stuff.” Cathy smoothed her map and began tracing routes among the venules and arterioles between their apartment and various monuments and attractions. Peter just went with his flow. He watched his film but couldn’t concentrate.

The flight attendants intimidated Peter. They were too tall, too good looking. It gradually came to Peter that at least two of them had had work done. *They’re so young.* He felt puffy and haggard in comparison. He was missing out. He’d have to do something soon to keep up. *Keep up or get left behind.*

Peter frowned when he heard one of the cabin crew speaking a language he didn’t recognize. Peter thought about his doomed efforts at high school French (the class laughing as he pronounced the French word for tea as *the*) and his half-hearted term of Japanese in university. *How many languages did they need to know just to do this job?* Finally, their manners were just too much. When Peter handed the male flight attendant, who could have been an underwear model, his dinner dishes, the man said, “You are kind.” Peter slumped perceptibly in his seat.

Later, when the cabin crew had closed the window shades, Cathy put on her sleeping mask, inserted her earplugs, reclined her seat, and succumbed to sweet sleep. Peter had finished with his entertainment but was not tired. He stretched his legs into the aisle and took in his surroundings. Most of the passengers were slumbering; some with their arms held against their chests, hands together at their chins, their heads crooked fetally forward. Peter considered the interior twilight of the cabin, the muffled din of the engines, the sound of his circulation and breath under his earplugs: a gigantic womb speeding through space.

Peter put on his sleeping mask, hoping the pressure on his eyelids would nudge him into slumber. Useless: he took it off. His film long over, Peter continued to watch the screen in front of him: the numbers—the airspeed, the temperature, the kilometres in their rapid and regular passage. He looked at the image of the earth, miles below them and noted the vessel’s position over the Arctic. He used to be interested in this—the flat

islands, the mountains, the points, the improbable parks: the shallow and deep bodies of water: inlets, channels, straights, gulfs named in the styles both forward and retrograde—Amundsen Gulf, the Gulf of Boothia—bays, basins, sounds. Peter put on his mask again, his interior landscape dark as pitch.⁴⁴ He tried a counting meditation: 1/100, 2/99, 3/98, and was half way through his third circuit before he gave up. He tried a body scan meditation imagining warm blood, plasma, lymph flowing and seeping through every part of his being. He started with his toes, but couldn't focus long enough to get past his knees.

Peter lay there, his thoughts invaded by images of the blood, sun, and sand from his film.⁴⁵ He craved some fresh air. A temperature two degrees cooler would have brought sleep. The only other passenger who seemed to be awake was a mother in a sock-footed slow dance up and down the aisles cooing to her month-old infant wrapped in a blanket of a hundred washings. Peter's heart slowed a little, doing as his hypothalamus bade. He imagined himself inside a great cell, sleep a fluid in which he was suspended on all sides. But he couldn't sink into that sleep and felt himself in the grip of a grim buoyancy. Cathy had encouraged Peter to make something good come from his sleeplessness and bought him a tiny notebook in which to write the interesting ideas that came to him during his extra and unwanted hours of consciousness. But the ideas that Peter got at these times never seemed very interesting to him, so he never wrote them down. He looked at Cathy snoring softly beside him.

The hours passed. He tried to lie still, tormented by a restless leg. At last he gave up. He rose, and with the help of the railing, (despite this period of wakefulness, he wasn't going to be doing very well on the Glasgow-Coma Scale) walked downstairs to the washrooms. Peter imagined himself falling through the floor of the aircraft. He washed his hair and wiped down his upper body with a cool cloth.

If on the journey to Munich the flight staff might have placed in a crystal glass some priceless elixir on the armrest to reside by Peter, the long flight passing without a drop spilled, the same cannot be said, unfortunately for our exhausted hero, on the short flight to Rome on a local airline.

⁴⁴ Cf. "a thick pitch bubbled" (*Inferno*, Canto 21, p. 126).

⁴⁵ Cf. "Thought invaded by images" (Rose, p. 57).

The Italian flight staff, gorgeous and swanlike, stood bored, leaning against some of the empty seats (too many empty seats, thought Peter, recalling some statistic he'd heard about plane crashes) toward the back of the craft as it leapt about in a chorea of motion over the Alps. Cathy looked out the window at the snow-covered peaks, while Peter sweated and clutched the armrests imagining the pilot cursing, thumping the console with his fist commanding the vessel to obey. One of the flight attendants, who really should have been a movie star, brandishing a pair of tongs, handed Peter a rolled hot towel suggestively. As Peter and Cathy disembarked, the flight crew called out to him, "*Buon Giorno! In bocca al lupo!*" in a way he found both inviting and dismissive.

In the taxi to their Trastevere apartment, Cathy somehow knew where they were going and somehow, as if by some autonomic guidance, Peter supposed, spoke with the driver, compelling him to make exchanges in Italian with her on their way into the city. Above the sounds of the radio news, she made comments about the weather, asked about the forecast, answered questions about their flights, where they were from, where they were going. Peter regarded the sights of light industry passing by. The driver turned up what Peter thought was a nauseating pop song on the radio. Peter lowered the window, rested his head on the door, and comforted by the touch of his girlfriend's hand on his neck, and the wind in his face, floated gratefully off to sleep.

Peter was next aware of waking in their dimly-lit apartment in early evening. Cathy was asleep. Peter splashed some water on his face and wrote his second blog post before falling into what he described to Cathy the next morning as "the sleep of the righteous." Cathy looked at his post muttering the words to herself as she read.

"Concerning the Praiseworthiness of the Heavenly Hosts"⁴⁶

"Flying to Europe: why didn't I think of this earlier? Cathy and I are in Italy now, and regardless of how this thing goes, you've got to hand it to those airlines: even back rowing with the slaves in economy, it's definitely a quality experience that gives the passenger a first-class feeling. Seriously people—I lack the words: clean, professional, quiet—I don't know what kind of aircraft these are, but all I can say is "bravo." And such service: the flight attendants are a force of nature. They really go that extra mile: they don't put up with any crap and they keep the passengers all in a state of perpetual

⁴⁶ Cf. Concerning Things for Which ... Are Praised or Censured (Machiavelli, p. 61).

reverence and terror.⁴⁷ The flight? The definition of tranquil. And the bathroom, the seats? I've stayed in hostels less comfortable, less welcoming than these airlines; I tell you, I have couch surfed in worse conditions. I swear to God, I am going to personally throw something up on Yelp about this when I get back home. Kudos to these people. And that's a stone ginger!"

Cathy regarded this text once more, holding her phone out to a trombonist's seventh position. "I guess you could do worse. It's clumsy but lucid."⁴⁸

"I don't mind lucid."

"And when did you do any couch surfing?"

"There's a lot you don't know about me," said Peter trying to clothe himself in a garment of mystery. When Peter, pleading jet lag, balked at attending that morning's Italian class, Cathy put on an optimistic aspect.

"Okay, sleeping beauty. I guess I can introduce you to your classmates tomorrow." She walked to the language school nearby, briefly meditating on and finally dismissing her feeling of pique at Peter's unwillingness to study,⁴⁹ and turned her mind toward the pleasing thought of meeting some new people there.

Peter meanwhile lay in bed for another couple of hours in thrall to Hypnos before dragging himself out of bed and leaving for the Borghese Gardens. Outside the museum Peter met Cathy, who was waiting, tickets in hand. Inside, they looked at the works in various galleries, Peter, hands in pockets, meandering in his car driver's stride, Cathy explaining the differences between the Renaissance and Baroque periods.⁵⁰ He overheard the guide of an American group talk about Bernini and Borromini and utter the name Virgil again and again. But this name, like the names Cathy had mentioned from her classics course last fall—Plato, Aristotle,⁵¹ Lucretius—was just another name to him. The young unhappy Persephone, that flower girl, and Daphne, that daddy's girl of

⁴⁷ Hannibal is an object of constant reverence and terror to his soldiers (Machiavelli, p. 67).

⁴⁸ The introduction describes *The Prince* as clumsy but lucid (Machiavelli, p. 9).

⁴⁹ See note 34 above.

⁵⁰ I first learned of the idea that the Baroque is Christian and that the Renaissance is classical from Professor Colby's April 1, 2016 lecture.

⁵¹ In her April 15, 2016 lecture, Professor Colby prioritized Virgil over Aristotle.

antiquity entrapped by the older, aggressive Hades and Apollo: these figures held little appeal for Peter, who crossed his arms counting the number of visitors who time after time made the same quip about the marvel of Hades's fingers pressed into Persephone's flesh. Yes, that Hades was a real bruiser.

And Peter found it hard to feel compassion for the figures in the paintings as well. Relationships with real people were hard enough—family: his parents, his sister, his dead grandmother—he couldn't escape these people. The same was true of people at work: the staff and dozens—no, one or two hundred folks he knew by sight who came into the store each week. He felt he owed something to them. Finally, there were all of the people driving the roads, walking the streets each day, all in some way responsible to each other. Most of these relationships Peter felt were tiring, tiring but reasonable. The subjects in these paintings on the other hand: did he also owe something to them? This seemed a bit much.⁵² For one thing, why did they all seem so burdened?⁵³ Peter regarded the innumerable images of ambivalent Madonnas shrinking from the smug or unhappy Christ children.⁵⁴ The unhappy ones he didn't mind: unhappiness was, after all, not an unreasonable response to life. But the others were awful: conceited, superior, sneering or leering at the Virgin, grasping at her breast with their chubby fingers, glaring with outraged hauteur at the cherubs competing for scarce resources from the Blessed Mother. Peter's mind drifted back to his childhood.

They went to their South Vancouver non-denominational church most Sunday mornings. Before the sermons, Peter and Olive left with the other children to go to another room in the building for Sunday school. They learned about events in the life of that smooth talking Prince of Peace: born in Bethlehem, raised in Nazareth, learning a trade, his baptism, his healings and teachings, his antipathy toward workers in the financial sector, his execution and rebirth, his message of divine love. With coloured markers, the children illuminated illustrations from the New Testament: the Sermon on the Mount, the miracle of the loaves and fishes, the Last Supper.

⁵² In *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry* Pater stresses the importance of having the right temperament to be moved by art (Pater, p. 82).

⁵³ In his work, Pater refers to subjects withering under divine pressure (Pater, p. 89).

⁵⁴ Pater points out the ambivalence depicted in the relationship referring to Madonnas shrinking from the divine child (Pater, p. 89).

They cut out pictures of the apostles and attached them to posters. Peter vexed his teacher (who had memory of—and a frustrated inclination to use—the school strap), and delighted his classmates (in taking on the role of Salome) by removing the heads of some of the prophets. These bearded and beheaded patriarchs he would glue on to the poster-board in incongruous and indecorous attitudes. The educationalist, the permissive times being what they were, and red-faced with distress at being denied even a temporary revival of the dunce cap, was further annoyed by Peter's pre-teen thought balloons to which he amended the disembodied ancients. What Peter liked best was the after-service indoor soccer games while the older members of the congregation lingered over baked goods and cups of tea.

Peter didn't know when, but from time to time, he heard his parents talking about the minister. He was said to be depressed, lacking enthusiasm, or dealing with an anger problem. His sermons often dealt with international current events—conflicts with arcane origins in distant and obscure countries Peter had never heard of. "It would be better," said his father to his mother once over Sunday lunch, "if he would stick to scripture." Some people were leaving the church. There was no announcement, but after their two-weeks of August Okanagan camping was over, they never returned to church. Peter didn't mind. He liked sleeping in.

Near the entrance to the museum gift shop, Peter regarded a mother and two young boys passing by. None of you still following along here will be surprised to learn of his displeasure, recalling no doubt his opinions about such children and their alleged musical inclinations. One boy was in a stroller, for which he was much too large, the wheels, suspension, and seating apparatus buckling under his bulk. This child giant evinced a Zen-like preoccupation with his hands. His brother was constrained by a halter attached to his mother's waist by a leash. She tried to focus on the works but was distracted, eventually taking on the aspect of a farmer at the plough, her stern whispers useless against the straining lunges of her eldest. The recumbent one began cooing repugnantly, his fingers seeking remote, and obviously pleasure-giving, regions of his nostrils. Peter shuddered and continued his survey of the Madonnas—resigned and seemingly suffering from exhaustion and thought of his own mother's frequently distracted expression. Later that night he wrote in his blog.

“The Dismal Wisdom of Our Forefathers”

“What is it with everyone in the country and their imaginary best friends? Adult Jesus, I kind of get: guy with a beard, lots of followers. But the baby Jesus, the pre-school Jesus? Why are there so many pictures of Him? You should have seen this one I saw today.⁵⁵ He must have been old enough to have his driver’s license, wandering around with his sacred junk hanging out like he was at some kind of nudist colony. Somebody please put some clothes on him or I’m going to call social services. Those old Christians: they really messed us up.⁵⁶ So why do we keep going on with it? Christians: more enslaved than the Seventh Day Adventists, more servile than the Jehovah’s Witnesses, more scattered than the Unitarians.⁵⁷ Those early Christians: what were they thinking, and why do they still prevail? What are we, animals? We’re not animals. We’ve got something called “reason” now. We’ve got to stop chasing fantasies and restrict human reason to sense experience.⁵⁸ Miracles do not exist—everything has to come from somewhere. And if we don’t know where something is from, we can still use our senses to understand things we can’t perceive. All natural things can be explained if you break things down to their smallest parts.⁵⁹ Am I right? Religion is all just so much emotion, more in line with a feeling of infantile helplessness than anything else.⁶⁰ And I tell you—give it up, people! We have to give up on ridiculous things like superstition, because superstition breeds evil.⁶¹ I will admit that there’s some nice painting and statuary with religious themes here. But it’s just too much. These kinds of things from the past are just not possible these days.⁶² And that’s a stone ginger.”

After Peter had posted this imperious manifesto, he reviewed what he’d written, nodded his head in approval, spun his phone with its ring on his middle finger like a

⁵⁵ Peter is referring to Caravaggio’s *Madonna and Christ Child with St. Anne*.

⁵⁶ Cf. Religion did a lot to persuade us to do wrong (Lucretius, p. 6).

⁵⁷ Cf. ... more enslaved than the Hebrews, more servile than the Persians, more scattered than the Athenians... (Machiavelli, p. 94 – 95).

⁵⁸ Lucretius discusses the relationship between reasoning and the senses (Lucretius, p. 121).

⁵⁹ The notion that all natural things can be explained if you break things down to their smallest parts comes from “The World and the Principles” (Descartes, p. xxv).

⁶⁰ Freud states that the religious attitude can be traced back in clear outlines as far as the feeling of infantile helplessness (Freud, p. 296).

⁶¹ Superstition breeds evil (Lucretius, p. 5).

⁶² Dante and art are not possible these days (Barrett, p. 25).

desperado on the American-Mexican border, and put it away. He lay awake into the night.

Cathy had been tranquil at the thought of Peter's skipping out on their first Italian class, but had to suppress the urge to display a rueful and sardonic expression upon learning of his intention to ditch their pre-registered, prepaid language classes altogether. Peter was happy to agree to differ on the topic and they settled on meeting just after noon the next day, once again at the Borghese. Peter took refuge from the sun on a bench under some trees near the Pincio. He stared for a while with glassy-eyed grit at the same page of Saramago's *Blindness*, brought along at Cathy's suggestion,⁶³ again and again before giving up. Bored with the quiet, he put in his ear buds, and listened to some music.⁶⁴ He looked at some locals, his age and younger, walking by.

Why is everyone so well dressed here, he thought looking at his own grocery store bought clothes.⁶⁵ He watched some boys playing soccer nearby, cowed at their superior ball control. The ball came over to him and he rolled it back. At home he might have joined them, but here he was disinclined.⁶⁶ They had a stereo with them playing the song he'd heard in the taxi coming from the airport two days earlier. A man, his voice roguish and effeminate sang an irritating refrain, "O Dio, che bella"⁶⁷ with car alarm music, the sirens rising again and again in truncated glissandi. Counter to his own wishes, he took out his phone and typed the first two words. The field auto-populated with the song name. Peter clicked on the first video: a middle-aged man in white high heeled boots and clown make-up was running in one place, shrugging his shoulders, moving his hands across his hairy chest showing over a low cut blouse, leering at the viewer, licking his lips, his tongue frequenting the neighbourhood of the corner of his

⁶³ José Saramago, the writer of *Blindness*, liked Niccolò del' Arca's *Compianto sul Cristo Morto* discussed later (Campanini, p. 12).

⁶⁴ We're afraid of silence so we fill our lives with noise (Kohák, p. 74).

⁶⁵ Pater writes about the importance of clothes (Pater, p. 100).

⁶⁶ Pater asserts that what we do best is play (Ibid, p. 100).

⁶⁷ In her March 12, 1819 letter to Marianne Hunt, Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley writes of her son William exclaiming, "O Dio, che bella!" whenever he saw something he liked (Bennett, p. 279).

mouth.⁶⁸ He lisped coarsely and on the /b/ dotted the camera lens with bits of spittle, some of it running down his chin obscenely. Peter scoffed and closed the screen.

Few events of Peter's life seemed remarkable to him. With his father, there'd been a trip to Disneyland where his sister Olive stayed in bed with the flu and a trip to Maui memorable because of Peter's spectacular sunburn. At home they went out to eat with their father, ordered in. There was a lot of time in front of the TV, in front of the computer. But there was an event he remembered with his mother that he wished had never happened.

One afternoon, Carol came into the house with some groceries while Peter was gathering the rest from the car. Now it's true that Peter was a good soccer player and on account of his height and physique might have become good at it if he'd practiced more. Like many boys his age he loved sports, and he was obsessed in general with certain functions of his body and with the human sexual response in specific. And what was just the thing to serve one in the pursuit of such physiologic function but some good old-fashioned visual stimulation? Walking past the family computer, Carol saw it awaken to Peter's desktop. In front of his folders and wallpaper of the Azzurri, the browser was open to a video, which Peter, in the bird-brained times during which all adolescent folks are sometimes susceptible, had neglected to close.

Carol pressed play to watch a few moments of this masterpiece of erotic cinema. The young female lead of this feature was moaning rhythmically as if in pleasure, but clearly struggling with the combined attentions of her male interlopers. Peter rushed into the room. "What are you doing?" His mother was ashen-faced.

"Why are you watching this stuff? Her face crumpled into a grimace. "Where—did your father show you this?" Peter reached across in front of her to the mouse and closed the window. Carol looked at the floor in silence.

"It's just a video. It's not hurting anyone."

"You have no idea," she said. "This isn't—"

⁶⁸ The ghastly young-old man Aschenbach encounters in *Death in Venice* drools and licks the corner of his mouth (Mann, p. 21).

“What are you doing with your hands?” said Peter. What is that praying, some kind of church thing?”

In subsequent days, Carol tried talking to her son. And to her credit she said all she could that might have helped. “This could really affect you. It could come between you and whoever you love. I want you to be happy, sweetie. Love is difficult enough without this.” But Peter couldn’t hear the intention behind her words. He felt she was invading his personal space, making inappropriate commentary about his sexuality. The transporters ceased to function, the gradients were fouled, the gates were closed, and the porous membrane that had existed between them was no longer permeable.

Cathy came out of the Borghese with her demoralizingly tall and attractive Italian class dialogue partner from Iceland. Matthias looked like a forester and displayed an appalling charm and social ease. Shaking hands, Peter immediately tried to grasp Matthias’s hand in a firm grip, but the Viking’s larger and rougher hand was flaccid and melted like water in Peter’s own. Above all, Peter was dismayed by the effortlessness of Matthias’s English, a slight softening of the consonants making it sound better than his own. “It’s so good to meet you, Peter, are you in Europe for the first time, you’re going to love it here, it’s going to change your life.” Peter nodded a lot and tried to make small talk.

At the entrance to the Vatican Museum, Peter and Cathy were immersed in a din of voices, most of them indistinct but the voice of a tour guide cut through all of the others: “...Roman Catholic Church... a frozen orthodoxy... a fluid state.”⁶⁹ Peter looked at his watch and thought about the late afternoon yawning before them, and the cost of their tickets. Inside the Sistine Chapel, Cathy stared for a long time at the ceiling. Peter struggled for space. He knew the one with God and Adam, but did a double take at some of the panels. *What was the Creator doing with his ass hanging out in the wind? And just what exactly were those two up to in the Garden?*⁷⁰ A disembodied voice boomed over the sound system reminding visitors to behave themselves. They didn’t, but neither did they have much fun. And despite the multitude of affordable books with

⁶⁹ Pater writes of the Roman Catholic Church fixing itself in a frozen orthodoxy when its beliefs had been in a fluid state (Pater, p. 9).

⁷⁰ Paulo Bultrini, in his May 23, 2016 Lecture in front of the Vatican Museum, spoke of the Sistine Ceiling paintings in amusing terms such as these.

great photographs of the ceiling for sale onsite, people took furtive pictures, preferring this unimaginative flaunting of authority to the amusement of looking at the ceiling itself.

Later in a church, whose name Peter declined to learn, where he found neither religious meaning nor beauty,⁷¹ and cranky after a crowded visit to St. Peter's, our hero wandered away from his companion for a while, taking indiscriminate photos of the floor, the columns, the statuary. Peter's mother had once, during the difficult days of his youth, tried to speak with him about her sense of religious feeling—her sense of wonder,⁷² her sense of awe,⁷³ but with little idea of what he was looking at, Peter was like a rat with a wire in his hypothalamus triggering its own stimulation. He stopped only after attracting the ire of a custodian who rebuked him in English. "This is a place of worship, not an amusement park."⁷⁴ After a simple dinner out and walking in the mid-evening sun, Peter complained, "What was his problem? It wasn't like I was the only one doing it." Cathy had nothing to say to this, and Peter walked with her back to their apartment in silence, meditating on the seemingly unlimited rules of travel he'd somehow failed to learn.⁷⁵ Before bed, he quelled his indignation by writing a post for his blog thusly:

"On Whether It Is Useful to Entertain High Expectations"⁷⁶

"Two words, people: egg pizza. "What's that," you say, "have I misread?" But no, you haven't. A pizza with tomato sauce and mozzarella—so far so good, right? But then a solitary chunk of artichoke heart, a slice of prosciutto so thin you can see through it, an anchovy fillet, and finally (in an unwitting homage to the poultry/brunch industry?)—a half of a boiled egg: each of these arranged according to the most exquisite conventions of layout and design, like a constellation in the night sky, and quite possibly the best pizza I've ever tasted—except it's not sliced. This operation, you must perform yourself. I'm not complaining. I'm not some soggy diapered child in a high chair trying to make the

⁷¹ In her May 11, 2016 lecture, Professor Colby suggested, via Pater, that Aesthetics had replaced religion in the 19th Century, stressing Pater's notions about the cult of the beautiful.

⁷² Cf. Both knowledge and religion begin and end in wonder (Carse, p. 5).

⁷³ In his lecture, Professor McCarron talked about the importance of awe in religion (McCarron, September 29, 2016).

⁷⁴ In *The Bacchae*, the chorus leader rebukes Pentheus for impiety (Euripides, Line 325).

⁷⁵ In *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*, Didion refers to youth who'd never been taught the games that hold society together (Didion, p. 84).

⁷⁶ Cf. Whether.... Are Useful or Not (Machiavelli, p. 79).

great leap forward to the knife and fork, nor do I consider myself some kind of plantation owner who needs everything to be done for him by servants: it's just that when you travel halfway around the world you might expect a little more from the land that invented the pizza. Now I know I'm abroad, and when in Rome, as they say, but sometimes it's just too much. You enter an establishment: you're seated in a tiny chair amid a hive of tourists, a waiter comes along who must be some kind of disgraced diplomat or aristocrat in exile because he speaks at least eight languages and will brook no refusal at his patrician offer of some expensive bubbling water; you endure the icy pastoral care of this gray eminence and you know for sure that this is some sort of royal sinecure for him because his rudeness will never deprive him of his job, although by the end of it all you'd like nothing more than to deprive him of his life.⁷⁷ And when you finally extract yourself from this situation, you'd better watch your step on those damned black cobblestones: they're treacherous. Just this evening, I saw this well-fed traveler take a tumble. He probably gave himself a life-altering injury. I tell you, people: Rome is a paradise—a physiotherapist's paradise: beneficial to health care practitioners, disastrous for tourists.⁷⁸ Take care, holidaymakers. Take care. And that's a stone ginger."

He posted this, and then reviewed it wondering about changes he might have made. Cathy was asleep. Peter lay awake thinking.

He thought of his saying goodbye to Olive and his mother at the bus station the summer after high school as he left to go tree planting. In the glow of the car dome light, he said his farewell to Olive, her mouth a little open, her nose wrinkled as if she wanted to sneeze. He spoke in clichés, "I promise I'll keep in touch, you two look after each other." He hugged his mother's shoulder as she sat, hands in her lap. He breathed in her familiar scent, waved, gathered his gear, and walked into the station without looking back. During the following weeks of blisters, black flies, muscle pain, and exhaustion, Peter continued to get letters from his family. His father's, "I hope you're doing okay," sounded over familiar to him. *How dare he*. And even Olive's "You mean a lot to me," and "I think about you all the time," sounded stupid. On his return, Peter brushed off Olive's joke about Peter's long camping trip with a quip that his camping trip was more like time in a refugee camp. He stayed a week before finding a place to live.

⁷⁷ Deprive him of his authority and his life (Machiavelli, p. 76).

⁷⁸ Useful for... disastrous for... (Ibid, p. 56).

The memory of his mother's estrangement at this time suddenly came to Peter. He felt guilty and thought of giving her a call.⁷⁹ He tried to push the idea away, but it stuck in him like an aspirated measure of sputum he struggled to cough out.

After sleeping in and a leisurely morning at a laundromat while Cathy was devoted to her studies, Peter made his way to the Forum. He found a radio station to stream, heard a broadcaster speaking for a few seconds, and thought about the years of study it would take to be able to understand him before arriving at the certainty that he would never know another language in his life. He was about to search for something else when abruptly there it was again—that ridiculous huffing and puffing song from before. Peter stopped on a corner and searched for it on his phone. A karaoke version appeared in English.

“When I see it in the park, when I see it in the woods, when I see it at the beach—O Dio, che bella.

It's something really swanky, it's all money in the banky, it really turns my cranky—

I'm feeling really goodsie when I see it in the woodsie, it is a lovely creature when I see it at the beacher—O Dio...⁸⁰

Peter turned it off meditating on his superior taste in music and walked the streets mildly disappointed.⁸¹

It wasn't that he found old Rome unlovely: in an outburst of broadmindedness, he decided that the footbridges across the Tiber were attractive. But it felt gallingly unsystematic to him. One disorganized neighbourhood led to the next. Circles of sweat formed under his arms and all the plazas were starting to look the same.⁸² By the time he

⁷⁹ In “Our Friend Judith,” Doris Lessing writes about the difference between sin and guilt (Lessing, p. 192).

⁸⁰ Cf: Nabokov's “stars that sparkled, cars that parkled,” etc. from *Lolita*.

⁸¹ This is in contrast to the Italian capacity for joy in the everyday that Professor Colby referred to in her April 15, 2016 lecture.

⁸² EB Browning refers to the people in the hot piazzas (p. 37).

met Cathy, Peter was starting to feel engulfed by the weather.⁸³ They walked—go, go, go—from site to site, and it became clear, even to Peter, that there was no flow. Things were stuck. He was troubled at having no idea of what was happening in the country and he wasn't feeling enthusiastic about travel the way he told himself he was in his twenties. The bliss of his infant-like ignorance regarding a political coup in Thailand the year before he'd arrived for a beach vacation during this time had done nothing to diminish his backpacker's zeal for the country. Eventually Peter dragged Cathy to the periphery of a stream of people, like so many blood cells in a capillary, trying to get some room. He wished there were some more nature. Walking amid the Temple of Caesar, the Temple of Vesta, the Temple of Saturn, Peter felt a perpetual lack of space. But worse than this deficit of physical liberty was an acute awareness, in his memory, of a surplus of time.

He knew that like everyone else's, his own past was long and copious.⁸⁴ In an unexpected psychic concurrence, Peter found himself comparing the past of this city to the past of his mind. He thought of what Cathy had talked about in her enthusiasm for Rome: the early Caesars, the Servian Wall, the Septimontium, the Roma Quadrata, the earlier Etruscan forms.⁸⁵ They were all here somewhere. And he suddenly arrived at the idea that in mental life, all that's ever been formed can never perish.⁸⁶ The city, his mind: it was suddenly too much to take in: the Republic, the Empire, the Middle Ages, the great metropolis beyond grown in the centuries since the Renaissance.⁸⁷ Resisting the difficult excavation of his memory,⁸⁸ Peter thought of his mother and her work as a librarian. Early in her career she'd worked in the old central branch of the Vancouver Public Library, the site of which in later incarnations took the form of a music and video store: and now, he thought with some derision, a large underwear emporium. Peter's

⁸³ Scappettone, in writing about Venice, refers to weather engulfing the subject (Scappettone p. 152).

⁸⁴ Freud discusses Rome's long and copious past (Freud, p. 296).

⁸⁵ "...the early Caesars, the Servian Wall, the Septimontium, the Roma Quadrata, earlier Etruscan forms..." (Ibid, p. 295 – 296).

⁸⁶ Ibid, p. 295.

⁸⁷ Cf. "... a great metropolis which has grown up in the last few centuries since the Renaissance" (Ibid, p. 296).

⁸⁸ Freud refers to sections of the Servian Wall in the Forum that have been excavated (Ibid, p. 296).

mind wandered back to what he felt were the more carefree days of a decade earlier. “Why don’t we go to a club this evening?” he said, eager for some fun.⁸⁹

“We can do that anywhere. While we’re here we’ve got to do the historic,” said Cathy, steering them toward the Colosseum. “We’re in history here.”⁹⁰ Presently, they found themselves in a cervix of tourists moving incrementally toward the monolith.

Pleading dehydration and light-headedness (and seeking refuge in that old chestnut—he’d forgotten to eat this morning!) Peter coaxed, “Let’s do something different. We’re already going to the Pantheon this evening. If the weather stays like this we’ll be able to see it by moonlight.”⁹¹

“I’ve been planning this a long time. I’ll go by myself.”

“No, I can come with you.”

“You don’t have to be a martyr.”⁹² Peter looked once more at the structure looming ahead then left in search of a cold Peroni in a nearby café.

Peter’s perpetual breaks with his past left him unable to connect with his childhood⁹³ and this affected his relationships with women. And as he nursed his beverage, the bottle sweating with condensation in the air-conditioned café, he brooded over some of the facts of his nonchalant youth. At 19, his inamorata didn’t feel important to Peter and told him he had problems with intimacy; at 21 after another, he hoped that next time he could find someone without so many problems; at the end of a relationship, and now 23, with yet another, the elder Stone’s brow furrowed as his son criticized himself—in a rare show of filial confession—for being too passive, with a need to “get his testicles back.” To his fourth paramour, who’d compared his demeanour in bed (unfavorably) with that of a robot, Peter said that he wasn’t going to “put up with that,”

⁸⁹ Like Mrs. Miller in Rome, Peter hates the sites (*Daisy Miller*, p. 25).

⁹⁰ Cf. Scappettone’s idea about the travel experience being obsolete (Scappettone p. 146).

⁹¹ In her March 12, 1819 letter to Marianne Hunt, MW Shelley writes of seeing the Pantheon by moonlight (Bennett, p. 279).

⁹² During her April 29, 2016 lecture, Professor Colby said that Daisy Miller in the Colosseum had become one with the martyrs of the past.

⁹³ In her introduction to Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Marble Faun*, Susan Manning writes that Hawthorne’s novel was really the first time for Americans to examine their past (Manning, p. xxxiv).

and resolved to make more male friends. At the start of his fifth “serious” relationship in nine years—and at last starting to doubt himself, (but number five is the charm?) Peter told himself that he would go that extra mile, to make the relationship a success, but when after a year his latest Francesca⁹⁴ told him that he might be trying to recreate childhood patterns, he told her that he had to get out of this “intolerable situation.” And like his experiences with these past loves, he felt his confidence with his current one falter.

So when Cathy met him after her sojourn in the Flavian Amphitheatre, he made sure a cold limoncello was waiting for her, his enthusiasm to hear all about Cathy’s experiences in the Colosseum matched only by the sincerest, clear-eyed regret at having missed seeing the locus of olden days atrocities up close in person. “Oh my God, what was I thinking? I don’t know what came over me.” And then going that extra mile, “Missing this will be the bittersweet element that makes a trip truly memorable.” Toward the end of their drink, Peter even suggested that Cathy, because “it’s important to make friends while we’re here” invite Matthias to join them for the evening.

Later at their *cena in ritardo* at a trattoria, a jazz instrumental was playing. Cathy and her new friend were vocalizing with a tune that Peter didn’t know, closing their eyes, moving their heads, embracing each other like two of the four emperors. They looked at Peter familiarly breaking into words on the refrain, “a love divine.” Peter moved his lips along gamely and nodded knowingly presenting a mask of comprehension. Matthias spoke, “Cathy tells me that Rome hasn’t really lived up to your expectations,⁹⁵ that’s too bad, she says you’re going to Venice soon, I think Venice will be really good for you.” Peter tried to put on an optimistic aspect, but perspiring with anxiety, his acute stress response would not be gainsaid: *I’m going to, she says that, Cathy tells me...* Peter searched the menu and suggested a bottle of Borolo and a plate of antipasti to start while the deluge of anger gradually subsided. Matthias held court, talking about the concert they’d just attended, with the occasional interpolation directed toward Peter: “Your face is very red, are you okay?”

⁹⁴ After the Francesca in Dante’s *Inferno*, Book V.

⁹⁵ Mrs. Miller is disappointed in Rome. After hearing too much about it, her expectations are unmet (*Daisy Miller*, p. 38).

“He’s fine,” said Cathy. “He had a little too much sun at the Forum today.” Matthias continued.

“Palestrina is the most important composer before Bach, stylistically conservative, the musical ideal of a certain kind of Catholicism, indifferent to many of the musical trends of the 16th Century.” To Peter, Matthias had an intimidating and seemingly inexhaustible and endlessly self-perpetuating supply of vocabulary, like blood cells from red bone marrow, to describe the work of this so-called Prince of Music.⁹⁶ Peter sat, elbow on the table, his hand in a loose fist, index finger against his upper lip, his expression grave. He heard the words, “exemplar for future centuries.” He made out the words “amalgamated,” “assured,” “absorbed.” Central among these was the term “Counter Reformation.” Something about the music was said to be “restrained.” It was suggestive of a “distant and more pious era.” Peter heard the terms “Fauxbourdon,” and “Franco-Flemish Counterpoint.” He took a long sip of his wine, nodding his head, showing a simulacrum of interest. The collocation “placid symmetry” was pronounced. Matthias spoke of “ceremonial and sacred texts.” He used non-musical terms like “inwardness” and phrases like “detached style” and “purposefully restricted.” The music was said to be “articulate.” And of course Cathy had to jump in with the word “spiritual,” and then “organic.” There was something called the “Ordinary of the Mass.”

Peter sawed haphazardly at a piece of fatty salami as he listened to what sounded like an improvisation—“pure, purity, purification.” Matthias paused for some water after the word “radiance.” Peter looked at Cathy, inhaled, and neglecting his sawn shard of processed meat was about to say something, but then came the cluster “tranquil, temperate, quiet.” From time to time, Peter felt he was assimilating an entire sentence: “For a deeply religious work, it is highly sensuous.” He was aware of the word “transparent,” but the monologue sounded anything but. Peter refilled their glasses and cleared his throat.

“Well for a classical concert, I probably wouldn’t have chosen an *a capella* group.” Matthias came right back putting his hand reassuringly on Peter’s arm.

⁹⁶ Much of the ideas in this description of Palestrina’s music come from Grout (Grout, p. 263 – 270).

“It’s true of course that there is no instrumental accompaniment, this music is a part of a centuries old tradition, this is not just entertainment, it was a deeply functional part of the listeners’ lives.”

“At least you must have been impressed with the venue,” said Cathy.

“I don’t know much about these kinds of things,” Peter said, conscious of his intellectual inferiority.⁹⁷ “There are a lot of great places in Rome, although I have to admit the acoustics were excellent.”

“Acoustics,” said Cathy. Peter bit down on an olive pit, then swallowed hard to avoid choking. “We’re at the Santa Maria Maggiore and you’re talking about—you weren’t even there for most of it. I thought we were going to have to send out a search and rescue team, put out a missing person’s report.” Matthias joined in, forming his hands into the shape of binoculars, looking around the restaurant as if into some distant horizon.

“Where is Peter?”

“Dove è Pietro?” said Cathy modeling a telescope.

“Yes, somebody find him, for Pete’s sake.”

“Okay, you got me,” said Peter, smiling at last, throwing his hands up in mock defence.

Before the show, three hours earlier, Cathy and Matthias were speaking Italian together. At each appropriately completed portion of dialogue, Matthias said, “Brava” or “Molto bene, Signora.” Cathy blushed, Peter’s pulse accelerated. Somehow the two of them started singing “Moon River” in Italian, in review of the morning’s lesson. Peter couldn’t understand how this fifty-hour friend had become so important in Cathy’s life. Inside the church, he slouched, his right leg sticking into the aisle, Peter absently

⁹⁷ “... conscious of his intellectual inferiority...” (Orwell, p. 293).

scratching at the back of his left knee, staring at his phone.⁹⁸ An usher arrived scowling. Peter sat up and looked at his program.

A much-decorated group from the UK was there for an important anniversary. Peter was not an admirer of psalms but considered some of the text for one of the pieces: “Like a lily among thorns, so is my love.”⁹⁹ The lights dimmed. The singers came on to the stage followed by the director.

The music wasn’t unpleasant but Peter found it static, lacking rhythm. The director moved in precise jerky movements. This angular dance took our protagonist out of the music, but he tried to follow along. The music called simple images to Peter’s mind, his interior landscape owing as much to his desktop screensaver animations as to anything else: a pebble splashing in a clear blue pond, ripples moving to the edge and back, colliding with new ones. The singers cradled their music in their hands, communicating with the director. Peter focused on a soprano he liked.

The voices seemed to be taking turns: their voices rose and fell together—they repeated and echoed each other, moved toward and away from each other, converged and touched, before moving apart again. They interrupted and finished each others’ phrases. It wasn’t that the music lacked emotion, thought Peter. On the contrary he thought that it must be highly affective to some, but not to him. The music was good, almost too good, with too much focus on talent, technique, perfection, the singers like athletes at the point of exhaustion. No one was smiling; no one was having fun. He looked around at the people near him, their eyes transfixed. One man across the aisle was obviously moved. And Cathy too was deeply involved with what she was experiencing.

Peter closed his eyes for a moment and fancied he saw a scene from nature—a blue pond: the blue of his pond was changing gradually to red and back to blue. He saw pebbles dropped into the pond, forming rings. The rings of his pool contracted and expanded slowly in a pump-like motion. The rings broke off, segments of long fibres

⁹⁸ In her work, Rose writes of people with no toleration for boredom, looking for solace in their personal devices (Rose, p. 87).

⁹⁹ Like a lily among thorns, so is my love... (The Tallis Scholars, p. 5).

diminishing, transforming into triangles, squares, rectangles, five, six, seven, eight, and many sided two dimensional shapes before changing back into circles.

Gradually the solution of his pond began to fill with particulate, becoming thick and syrupy. Globules formed. They broke apart and joined again. The fluid began to congeal and a membrane grew across from the periphery to the centre until it met at the midpoint and fell into itself. The music of the Sanctus faded into the dusk of Peter's consciousness. Some impulse jerked him back into the present. He opened his eyes, then squeezed them shut again. He raised his eyebrows looking at the wall, the floor, the ceiling and felt as if they were all suspended inside a great fundus. He looked at the stage in the dim distance. Peter lifted his shoulders, rubbed his forehead and closed his eyes, clenching his fists between his knees to stay awake. He inhaled deeply. Cathy nudged him with her elbow. He opened his eyes. She squeezed his hand and pointed to the stage with her chin. Peter smiled wryly.

During the Benedictus, Peter closed his eyes telling himself he was just focusing, tracing the lines of the music in his mind's eye. Just before the Agnus Dei, Peter twitched awake, lurching upright. He drew his hand across his chin. Alone in the silence and thinking the music was finished, Peter brought his hands together twice in applause before stopping. Matthias had resumed his lecture.

Peter heard the words "voices continue," "voices overlap," and "voices stop," but the Viking's never seemed to do the latter. *How could he possibly know so much about such obscure music at his age? And damn his fine English.*¹⁰⁰ Matthias was younger, but to Peter, he sounded like a professor. With nothing more to lose, Peter tried to describe what he was experiencing with the music. "Sometimes the voices move really close to each other, like they're touching." Matthias took a moment to explain what a suspension was. "How do you know all of this?"

"I started singing in a choir in primary school in Akureyri, all kids in Iceland have to sing in a choir, music education is very important, do you sing, it seems like you have a good ear, you should join a choir, I think you'd like it very much."

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Winterbourne, regarding Daisy Miller's friend Giovanelli "... his fine eyes." (*Daisy Miller*, p. 45).

Peter had in fact spent hundreds of dollars on a largely neglected digital audio workstation.¹⁰¹ He'd had a year of middle-school concert band two decades earlier where he'd hung out with the woodwinds before quitting, unhappy at his exile from what he thought was his rightful place among the percussionists. He didn't know why he still kept his bass clarinet in his mother's house under his childhood bed. More eager than ever to impress, Peter posted the following when he returned to the apartment, emphasizing the multitudinous ways the Forum had failed to charm him.

“How to Endure Acute but Sadly Predictable Episodes of Public Indignity”¹⁰²

“The broiling heat and general unpleasantness of this so-called Forum was made worse by the swarms of tourists crawling around these shabby ruins. They're from everywhere, and everywhere we went they followed and made us their dupes: exploited by the French, dishonoured by the Yugoslavians, browbeaten by the Germans, subjugated by the Chinese.¹⁰³ The presence of these foreign hordes was made worse by their nauseating tour guides.¹⁰⁴ I know we were outside, but these people could learn a thing or two about using their inside voices. These chaperones led their flocks about carrying vulgar parasols and shouted their facts to their listeners in their incomprehensible prattle. Some of these world travelers—I think they were from Russia—were so bloated, puffy, and obese they looked like extravagantly dressed elephants. And they seemed to consume everything the guides said like a bunch of toadying sycophants.¹⁰⁵ At the head of one group was this woman and her mother, the kind of crone you would of expected back in the day to be carried in a sedan chair. She was in a motorized scooter and had a staff of liveried care aides. She was lifted in her conveyance and carted over the rough places of the ruins by her squadron of glittering flunkies.¹⁰⁶ I swear, it was too much. I would have loved nothing more than to see them

¹⁰¹ In her introduction to Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Marble Faun*, Susan Manning writes about Hawthorne's anxieties about his failing creative powers and loss of confidence in the value of those powers (Manning, p. xxxix).

¹⁰² Cf. *How to Govern Cities...* (Machiavelli, p. 28).

¹⁰³ Cf. *Dishonored by the Swiss...* (Ibid, p. 55).

¹⁰⁴ Cf. *foreign hordes* (Ibid, p. 97).

¹⁰⁵ Cf. *...crowds of toadying sycophants* (Seneca, p. 72).

¹⁰⁶ Cf. *an army of glittering flunkies* (Ibid, p. 69).

all fall to their deaths from Traitor's Rock during a group photo.¹⁰⁷ Honestly, I'm afraid that if I see much more of this kind of thing I saw today, I'm going to have to put my eyes out. And that's a stone ginger."

Before lights out, Peter checked his work email and found nothing he needed to respond to. In contrast with the difficulties he experienced in his personal relationships, the shallow, contextual relationships he had in operations at the national drug store chain where he worked came easily to him. Peter's dependability, eagerness to embrace new technologies—the happiness promised by tech a salve on the bruise of his brittle character—like the store's new "tap 'n take" program, (his articulations of "you've got to keep up or get left behind" were heard at each store to which he was assigned) and his "first-rate instincts" made him a favourite with his superiors.¹⁰⁸ When asked, after encouraging older customers to use the automated checkout, whether he was interested in keeping his job, Peter replied winningly to all within hearing, "the banks have been automated for decades: I think the banks are doing just fine."

Peter's best friend was John, a pharmacist twelve years his senior, whom he'd met through work. John, an erstwhile seeker, loved to tell Peter over beer at a local craft brewery about his readings on Daoism, Islam, Buddhism. Peter loved the attention, but was no student (as we may imagine) of world religions. He kept his end up by interpolating such facile rejoinders as "Are you explaining, or demonstrating?"¹⁰⁹ John, a large man with large appetites, cocked his head, a hand on his cheek in his debater's stance, amused. Peter's contributions to these exchanges took a prophylactic, and sometimes abortive, turn when John brought up, with some missionary zeal, various notions of the afterlife. A lesser person than John might have been hurt at Peter's habitual silences. Peter often seemed to be listening to what John had been saying for a considerable time before replying with a personal motto, adapted from a well-known TV catch phrase: "Live well, but don't worry about death."¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ Traitor's Rock—the Tarpeian rock on the Capitoline Hill from which traitors were cast (Lucretius, p. 103).

¹⁰⁸ Buford emphasizes the importance of instinct, not skill (Buford, p. 69).

¹⁰⁹ Cf. "There is a big difference between proving and explaining. I add that one can use the term "demonstrate" to mean one or the other..." (Descartes, p. xxi).

¹¹⁰ Cf. "... toss that dread of Death out on its ear ..." (Lucretius, p. 73).

At the flagship store, Peter was friendly toward the customers, on speaking terms with many of the seniors who came in each week to check their blood pressure, and always had superficial greetings for the folks who came in each day for their methadone. One client Peter thought about sometimes—a punk girl, beautiful but hiding it behind a presentation of green hair shaved at the sides and a lot of black make-up. He saw her sitting on the street about once a month in front of the store with a beautifully scripted sign: “hungry.”

Peter didn’t have an especially strong feeling of vocational pride regarding the foods, drinks, household items, or seasonal trash that filled the store, but he felt good about the pharmacy. He had no pharmacologic training himself, but reasoned that pharmacists (unlike doctors, whom, despite their learning, he regarded as quacks) performed a signal duty to humanity, helping clients, with the medicines they dispensed, to live better lives.

Peter Stone had made it part way through his third year in a geography degree, never taking more than two courses at a time, for years nurturing a partly conceived notion of one day doing some graduate work in coastal erosion, big storm events, floods, rising sea levels. But when management made Peter a formal offer to join them, he did. They offered in-house training and subsidized business classes. This self-described “early adopter, quick adapter” didn’t see any point in finishing his degree.

After the brilliant screed of his recent post, Peter had trouble sleeping. And he woke after a short sleep, aware of an irritation on the back of his left knee. In the morning, Cathy fingered the tender area. “It’s not painful; it’s nothing to worry about,” said Peter standing naked in the shower looking back toward Cathy kneeling behind him.

They took a taxi to the Fatebenefratteli Isola Tiberini Hospital.¹¹¹ While Cathy was filling out Peter’s form, he walked about the entrance to the hospital, reading the text inscribed in the carved marquee on the door, focusing on the word “succorso.” Cathy described his situation to a gaunt English-speaking resident, Doctor Calvino, who

¹¹¹ NB: For the story’s references to sickness and healthcare therein, I owe much to LS 819 classmate Linn Teetzel. Her unfortunate fall and injury and hospital visit to Rome’s Fatebenefratteli Isola Tiberini Hospital on May 27, 2016 led me to much thinking and reading about Bologna’s Santa Maria della Vita cathedral in general as locus and Niccolò del’ Arca’s *Compianto sul Cristo Morto* in specific as an artifact deeply imbued with meaning related to the feelings of hope and anguish we may associate with having loved ones suffering with sickness.

diagnosed an infection, surmising that Peter may have been bitten by some kind of bug. “Is there anything I can take for this?” asked Peter.¹¹² Calvino prescribed a course of antibiotics. While they packed, Peter confessed that he didn’t remember feeling anything. “I don’t really know what it was, maybe a spider, or a bee.”

“For me neither the honey nor the bee,” said Cathy kissing him on the cheek.¹¹³ Thirty minutes prior to their departure for Venice, they found a farmacia near their platform at the Roma Termini.

The blue canals, the bridges, the piazzas, the designer stores, the late afternoon light, the crowds.¹¹⁴ For a while, they walked along the Grande Canal, Peter in a funk, impatient with their delayed commute between cities. Peter wanted to think of himself as easygoing and was finally realizing that he wasn’t.¹¹⁵ Cathy, on the other hand, was a great traveler, who didn’t mind unexpected changes, or getting lost. For her, not having a good time was part of her good time.¹¹⁶

“You look like you’ve got something you’d like to talk about,” said Cathy.

“I’m just taking it all in. The water’s beautiful. I guess this is why everyone wants to go t’Italy.¹¹⁷ He’d hoped for beautiful order. But what he got was disorganized truth.¹¹⁸

On the map the district of San Marco seemed to Peter to fit into San Polo and the southern lip of Dorsoduro like a great flagellum into the mouth of its owner. “You there,” said Cathy, jostling Peter’s arm. “This is a city of lagoons.¹¹⁹ Don’t you like lagoons?”

“It’s a city of swamps,” he said, reminded of his uncompleted degree.

¹¹² Cf. ...what would avail against my sickness, what drug would cure it: / Tell me if you know... (Aeschylus, Lines 605 – 606).

¹¹³ For me neither the honey nor the bee (Sappho, Fragment 39).

¹¹⁴ Scappettone refers to the crowdedness of Venice, asserting that visitors won’t have [their] own space (Scappettone, p. 154).

¹¹⁵ In contrast to Peter’s experience therein, Scappettone asserts that Venice is adaptable (Ibid, p. 116).

¹¹⁶ Cf. The exchange between Daisy and Winterbourne wherein she asks why he is so serious (*Daisy Miller*, p. 31).

¹¹⁷ Mrs. Miller’s articulations of “to Italy” are written as “t’Italy” (Ibid, p. 26).

¹¹⁸ Scappettone asserts that Ruskin focuses too much on the beautiful order, not the disorganized truth (Scappettone p. 139).

¹¹⁹ City of lagoons (Ibid, 107).

“Look at that gondola,” said Cathy. Peter looked at the lavish seats and glossy lacquer finish of a vessel passing a few metres away. Peter regarded the pilot, maybe an immigrant, he thought, and admired his skill.¹²⁰ Despite the weight of the passengers, the boat responded gaily to the hand expert with oar.¹²¹ “Let’s take a ride in one,” said Cathy.

“It probably costs quite a bit.”¹²² Peter was of two minds. He liked to save money. On the other hand, he regarded the apartment they’d rented in Rome from the online marketplace and hospitality platform as little better than a flophouse. And yet in Venice, now staying in a nice hotel, he regretted the expense.

“Let’s not worry about money for now,” said Cathy. They continued their walk. “Listen to all the people; it’s so cosmopolitan.” Peter allowed, with his typical bisecting sense of humour, that it was indeed miraculous that somehow the combined powers of both the allied forces and Mussolini had failed to destroy the city. “Venice isn’t fascist, it’s European,” said Cathy.¹²³

Coming out of the bathroom later, Peter saw Cathy working at the desk, writing a letter on hotel stationery. “Who are you writing to?”

“This is for William. I’ve also got a postcard for Matthias.” Peter snorted.

“Why don’t you just text them? You should go paperless.”

“Innovation doesn’t always equal progress.”¹²⁴ And letter writing is a wonderful way of honouring the past.¹²⁵ I think both of them would really appreciate this.” She continued writing, her hand steady and dexterous. *At least they don’t say disappointing things.*¹²⁶

¹²⁰ Cf. The foreign gondolier in *Death in Venice*.

¹²¹ Cf. “The Wasteland,” lines 418 – 419.

¹²² In “Poitiers and Angoulême,” Ezra Pound mentions the medieval sin of “luxuria” (Pound, p. 243).

¹²³ Scappettone writes that Venice is European, not fascist (Scappettone p. 119).

¹²⁴ Innovation doesn’t equal progress (Malpas, p. 43).

¹²⁵ In her April 15, 2016 lecture, Professor Colby pointed to the importance of letter writing as a way of valuing the past.

¹²⁶ Daisy likes Giovanelli because he doesn’t say disappointing things (*Daisy Miller*, p. 56).

Cathy's silent response to his earlier food post motivated Peter to try a local specialty. But some native instinct drove him to make it a difficult experience. It took a long time for their meal to arrive.¹²⁷ And Peter was disappointed with the food: in Italy, he'd hoped for heaps of pasta swimming in unsubtle sauces, but the seafood he'd ordered at the Osteria Enoteca, was too complex for his palette to process.¹²⁸

When he ordered a salad to start the meal, the waiter bowed with jocco-serious ceremony bringing it with the main course.¹²⁹ When Cathy ordered water near the end of their dinner, Peter felt resentful at there not being more wine.¹³⁰ When Cathy wanted to leave some of her food on her plate, Peter wanted to take it with them: and when she wouldn't agree to this, he ate the rest of what was on her plate while she was in the restroom.¹³¹ During this hasty and surreptitious bout of gourmandizing, a small feral-looking child made his way through the restaurant lurching with great theatricality between the tables flapping his arms, making an odd onomatopoeic gesture, *dzzz, dzzz*. The boy jostled the table then stared at Peter with dull but knowing eyes. Peter frowned at this unsophisticated primate meditating, mouth agape, fork midway between mouth and plate, on its potential for a savant-like mania with a certain kind of unceremonious music making. *Dzzz*. Peter looked around for some parent or guardian who might belong to this wastrel. Finding none, he brought his attention back to his own table. The boy was gone. Peter, leaving just a little bit of the food untouched, quickly stacked their plates, and shoved them into the hands of their passing waiter just as Cathy returned.

Peter's only concession to the Italian dining experience was his willingness to leave a small tip,¹³² a vocation he'd served his entire adult life with regular, but tedious, zeal. His astonishing expertise in this particular area of the culture was not unexpected

¹²⁷ During the March 5, 2016 lecture, Professor Colby summarized some of the themes in *Under the Tuscan Sun* by referring to ways in which the narrator asserted her American time values on the people of Italy.

¹²⁸ Buford asserts that food is the concentrated message of culture (Buford, p. 25).

¹²⁹ In his May 21, 2016 lecture, Paolo Bultrini stressed the importance of eating the salad last during Italian meals.

¹³⁰ Tea, not wine, is served at the party in James' novella (*Daisy Miller*, p. 56).

¹³¹ In his May 21, 2016 lecture, Paolo Bultrini asserted that the taking away of leftovers is not a part of standard Italian dining culture.

¹³² In his May 21, 2016 lecture, Paolo Bultrini mentioned that a 6 – 10% tip is customary in restaurants in Italy, but not necessary.

for Cathy, and she laughed when our gallant emphatically offered to round up the few Euros to avoid the indignity of asking for change.

Later, strolling, hands in pockets, through the Campo San Gallo, they encountered a large brusque busker accompanying himself on a chromatic button accordion. “Venice in June,” said Cathy.¹³³ Peter wondered how such a song could be so popular. The baritone braggart before them rendered his rendition, pairing the fat off, but leaning into the syllables, his gray mutton chop whiskers and wattles trembling as he sang.¹³⁴ “This song—it’s everywhere,” said Peter, disavowing momentarily his parsimonious creed regarding those in the hospitality and fine arts sectors and tossed a few coins into the interior of the open worn indigo velvet instrument case before them. The singer bent at the neck in theatrical humility toward his unlikely benefactor. Peter moved his head in time with the song, with Cathy running ahead of him, running back, then ahead again clicking her heels.

Later, and feeling he was finally getting the hang of the place, our hipster Augustine wrote the following, his thumbs a blur in rebellion against tendinitis, the auto-correct working overtime on his personal device.

“Love, Tenderness, Thirst for Revenge”¹³⁵

“Ah Venice, city of marshes.¹³⁶ The floating city, built on quagmires. This place is in trouble and the clock is seriously ticking. I thought it was just Pisa with its tower. But apparently it’s this place too. I learned just recently that Venice sank 23 cm in the 20th Century. That sounds bad. But I don’t think that’s the worst of it. In addition to this, there are also rising sea levels from, what do they call it?—oh yeah, climate change. Even if we do start seeding the atmosphere with sulphate particles to cool things down a bit, this place is still doomed. It’s true they’ve kept this place going for centuries, but how long can they keep it up?¹³⁷ Locals here complain about the tourists, and they do have a lot to

¹³³ Cf. “Venice in May is better than April, but June is best of all” as in Henry James’s *Italian Hours* and as exemplary metrical sentence in style manuals.

¹³⁴ Cf. In *Death and Venice*, the mocking baritone buffo who disturbs Aschenbach’s calm (Mann, p. 63).

¹³⁵ Cf. “...with how much love, with what thirst for revenge...” (Machiavelli, p. 97).

¹³⁶ Scappettone characterizes Venice as a city of marshes (p. 106).

¹³⁷ *Ibid*, p. 105.

complain about—visitors here don't exactly seem to be the best and brightest the planet has to offer. But what else is there here but tourism? If I were in charge, I'd sell tickets: "Come and see it sink." Venice, the city of water—city of tears more like it. After we get back, I'm going to start a countdown clock for good old Seremissima. Good game, Venice. We need to put this place on deathwatch. And that's a stone ginger!"

Reading this, Cathy remarked, "You obviously don't have much time for nuance or shades of thought, but it's good for irony and sarcasm."¹³⁸ Peter spun his phone in the manner we've come to expect and put it away.

The next afternoon, passing the green-marble buildings of Florence, they walked along the river.¹³⁹ Cathy compared it to Joyce's Liffey. Peter thought about the Fraser River, which his old family home overlooked. He'd never considered it anything but muddy and unremarkable. He was similarly unimpressed with the river before them now. Cathy talked about Dante and his description of the Arno. Peter replied, "I don't know if I'd call it 'golden.' It's definitely something."¹⁴⁰ In the Museo del Duomo, Cathy looked in reverence at Donatello's haggard Magdalene, regarding the contrapposto thrust of her hips, the flexion of her left knee, the slimness of her unshod feet, her hands pressed together in devotion, her distracted eyes that would not meet the viewer's, the detail of her unkempt hair like strands of muscle.¹⁴¹ For his own part, Peter nodded in appreciation of the master's skill as a woodworker, paying little regard to the Son of God hanging around in the background.

The next day in the Uffizi, Peter looked at the works, but the paucity of his imagination could not animate the figures before him.¹⁴² Cathy, on the other hand, was

¹³⁸ The introduction suggests that there's no time for nuance or shades of thought in *The Prince*, but it's good for irony and sarcasm. (Machiavelli, p. 9).

¹³⁹ In *La Vita Nuova*, Dante writes about walking by the Arno River in Florence (*La Vita Nuova*, p. 55).

¹⁴⁰ In "Casa Guidi Windows," Elizabeth Barrett Browning refers to the golden Arno (EB Browning, p. 21).

¹⁴¹ During the March 5, 2016 lecture, Professor Colby told listeners that they could expect to be perplexed and overwhelmed by the detail of Italian beauty.

¹⁴² In her introduction to Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Marble Faun*, Susan Manning writes that Hawthorne had a weak visual imagination (Manning, p. xxxiv).

on fire: “I can feel this; it’s moving through me.”¹⁴³ Peter, who loved his screens, characterized himself as a visual person, oriented to his sense of sight, but before these works he remained an onlooker, unable to aestheticise his surroundings.¹⁴⁴ Cathy tried to explain to him that he had to reach the past through his non-visual senses. But with Peter’s uncurious temperament, the works were unnatural to him, not his thing.¹⁴⁵ She talked, and not for the first time, about the various periods in Italy’s past. But the layers were too much for Peter to take in.¹⁴⁶ With what could he compare this? The park he’d played in as a child had once been a garbage dump; the house he’d grown up in and those of his neighbours would soon become a condominium complex.

Peter elbowed for space, the air close and smelling of early summer sweat, the rooms crowded with wrinkled folk, their dewlaps flapping like sails. They wobbled on walkers as they stopped to catch their breath. Those in middle age were not much better, thought Peter (although this guy should talk) wearing baseball caps, carrying knapsacks; the young seemed to be dressed alternately as pimps or showgirls, taking acquisitive duck-faced selfies in V-for victory poses with images of the Redeemer.¹⁴⁷ And let us not forget the loud (and lachrymose) very young. The Babel of tongues sounded unnecessarily coarse, their vocal gestures grotesque. Everyone struck Peter as unintelligent.¹⁴⁸

In front of the Galleria dell’ Accademia, Cathy pulled at Peter’s arm to follow along with a British tour, the guide, abhorrent from the moment he opened his mouth, shouting above the din, “Michelangelo was a master of living stone.”¹⁴⁹ His listeners looked at their shoes and shifted their weight from foot to foot. The lecturer went on

¹⁴³ In her May 19, 2016 lecture, Professor Colby asserted that Ezra Pound felt that he could channel the past.

¹⁴⁴ Scappettone writes about onlookers unable to aestheticize their surroundings (Scappettone p. 154).

¹⁴⁵ Scappettone refers to reaching the past through touch, smell, hearing, taste, but not sight (p. 155).

¹⁴⁶ Scappettone writes about spectators seeing the art but their eyes failing to deal with it (p. 154).

¹⁴⁷ In her introduction to *The Marble Faun*, Susan Manning writes that the tourist’s gaze uninvested with emotional commitment to the object is acquisitive, possessive, rapacious, and dangerous (Manning, p. xxxii).

¹⁴⁸ EB Browning in her work refers to what she calls the unintelligent crowds (EB Browning, p. 49).

¹⁴⁹ “Michelangelo was a master of living stone—with him the very rocks seem to have life” (Pater, p. 8).

oblivious, relating the old saw about the artiste having grown up in a quarry. His followers sought fortifications against which to lean. Making eye contact with Cathy, the leader was momentarily confused at seeing one not belonging to his group taking down his words in a journal. He recovered and returned to his thousandth sermon on the topic with new vigour. "On the crown of David's head was a morsel of uncut stone, as if to maintain its connexion with the place from which it was hewn."¹⁵⁰ Peter looked at the man. He looked at Cathy. *No wonder she likes this guy, he sounds just like Matthias.* Cathy wrote in her notebook underlining the words: "...smashing an uncouth animation from the rock which he has torn from the moss."¹⁵¹ Peter shared a moment with a fellow dullard from the tour group, the two of them rolling their eyes in sad camaraderie.

Leaving Cathy and the others, Peter at last came to something he'd seen before. He regarded Botticelli's original panting of the goddess of pleasure, noticing for the first time the gray flesh, the wan flowers.¹⁵² Across the room was Cathy in a peak life experience before the *Primavera*. The figures in the paintings looked sad, smiling but unhappy.¹⁵³ Peter took photos but couldn't manage a shot without also capturing someone's craning neck with fleshy excrescence, or up-thrust, liver-spotted hands and wavering arms in support of a complex camera or industrial-sized tablet.¹⁵⁴ After forty-five minutes, Peter gave up. He observed Cathy across the room, now sketching something. He found an exit. Reluctant to walk, he spent the next hour sitting on a bench beside the river.

Peter recalled a trip he'd taken to Japan. He'd loved the planned rectilinear streets of Sapporo. The cities here, old Florence, Venice, Rome—built organically, but confusing to the visitor—felt like Kyoto, as complex to Peter as the structure of a renal cell. The streets looped back on each other and tangled in a ganglion of passageways. They narrowed gradually and menacingly like bronchi descending to bronchioles, where no exchange of gas was possible. Florence seemed as bad as Rome where he'd walked

¹⁵⁰ See Pater, p. 5.

¹⁵¹ ... the cathedral builder smashing an uncouth animation out of the rock which he has torn from the moss (Ruskin, p. 11).

¹⁵² Pater mentions the goddess of pleasure with grey flesh and wan flowers (Pater, p. 89).

¹⁵³ Pater writes of Botticelli's ineffable melancholy (Ibid, p. 87).

¹⁵⁴ In her introduction to *The Marble Faun*, Susan Manning writes that copying [taking a picture of] a work is taking a life (Manning, p. xxxiii).

one morning for 45 minutes at an allegro pace only to find himself in the same place he'd started. Despite the solid appearance of the ground beneath his feet, Peter felt insecure, like a false bone, fixed but unfastened.

Peter pulled out his phone and wrote the following repudiation of Firenze's Hellenic spirit.¹⁵⁵

"Reasonable to Assume This Would Be a Nice Place to Visit"¹⁵⁶

"Welcome to Florence—city of thieves! I won't dwell on it, but my friend nearly had her wallet stolen out of her bag in front of one of the museums this morning. The guy ran off without it, but if you want to have the experience of being ripped off, assaulted, swindled, or some encounter that's going to send you off into the sweet hereafter, come to Florence.¹⁵⁷ This place is really scraping the bottom of the tourism barrel.¹⁵⁸ I don't know why anyone goes here.¹⁵⁹ The Davids are okay, but it's hotter than hell, and what's up with the mosquitoes?¹⁶⁰ We couldn't sleep but the heat was just part of it. The traffic is really noisy here, with scooters buzzing around like insects at all hours of the night.¹⁶¹ And I'm glad to tell you that we're not driving here, because all the roads seem to be leading somewhere else¹⁶² and driving in this city is a killer. We saw the aftermath of a bad car accident earlier and it wasn't pretty. The sidewalks are so narrow here that to be a pedestrian is akin to being a suicide artist.¹⁶³ It's just sad. As for the cuisine, don't go to the restaurants. The service is terrible, but the food is worse.¹⁶⁴ By all means come to Florence and eat, if you like tripe. I ordered a bisque for lunch and I got

¹⁵⁵ Pater refers to the Hellenic spirit (Pater, p. 89).

¹⁵⁶ Reasonable to assume... (Machiavelli, p. 48).

¹⁵⁷ Cf. ... life-altering accident ... (McCarthy, p. 18).

¹⁵⁸ ... scraping the bottom of the tourist barrel... (Ibid, p. 3).

¹⁵⁹ Cf. Nobody goes there ... (Ibid, p. 2).

¹⁶⁰ Mosquitoes ... (Ibid, p. 6).

¹⁶¹ The traffic is noisy (Ibid, p. 9).

¹⁶² All the roads leading somewhere else (Ibid, p. 8).

¹⁶³ ... walking is suicide ... (Ibid, p. 7).

¹⁶⁴ The service is terrible but the food is worse (Ibid, p.17).

tripe. (At least my friend thought it was funny.) So definitely bring an appetite when you come here. Other than that, just come here and be a victim.¹⁶⁵ And that's a stone ginger."

The bug bite on the back of his knee now troubled him. The warmth he'd been experiencing there had not diminished and the skin was now itchy. When he returned to their hotel, Peter found Cathy packing her toiletries in the bathroom. The bottle of Barolo she'd bought for them in Rome was now in his suitcase. "Sometimes it's just better to take these things in on your own," he said through the ajar door. Cathy came out and began folding clothes. "It's probably better without the distraction of someone hanging around and not getting it." She went back into the bathroom. "It's like going out to a film by yourself." He picked up her notebook and sat on the bed looking at it. Cathy came out again wearing a discouraging sweatshirt. "Wow. You're really doing it," he said, his mouth dry. "I mean, look at you. It's like the grand tour. We should get you a bigger sketch pad, or an easel in here—"

"That's okay, Peter. That's nice of you to say," she said tousling his hair. He took her hand in his two and kissed it. "I know this isn't easy for you."

"No—"

"But you're not really here. I don't think I've ever seen anyone less present than you are." Peter nodded. Cathy sat on the bed beside him. "And I think that you've either forgotten me, or you love someone else."¹⁶⁶

"I know there's a lot I haven't told you. But it's hard."¹⁶⁷ Peter took a moment. "I know that I don't really have any business being with you."

"You don't give me much credit." They sat together on the bed in silence, Peter looking at his photos, Cathy writing a letter.

Later than evening, Cathy told Peter she'd be leaving to travel for a few days on her own. "I guess you'll be heading back to Rome," said Peter.

"I think I'm going to Milan. The Ars Ricordi Museum looks excellent."

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 9.

¹⁶⁶ Cf. "You have forgotten me, / or you love someone else more." (Sappho, Fragment 58).

¹⁶⁷ Cf. "I want to say something but shame prevents me." (Sappho, Fragment 50).

“Good for you,” said Peter, sounding out the words “Ars Ricordi” in his head.

“I’ll look forward to hearing all about it when you get back, if that’s okay with you.” Peter resolved that he would go on to Bologna, their original plan for their final days in Italy, by himself. Cathy gave him the address of their apartment and a map emblazoned with red circles. She tore some pages out of her book with notes on places for him to see in the city. “I’ll be fine. It’ll be good for me. You said it’s got the oldest university in Europe. It’ll be fun.”

On the morning of their parting while Peter was applying sunscreen, he saw Cathy’s face crinkle behind him in the mirror. “What’s happened to your leg? Let me look at it.”

“It’s fine.”

“Aren’t you taking your medication?” she said touching the affected skin.

“People take too many antibiotics,” he said, and not just in resistance to the learned physicians but disavowing even his fealty to the wise apothecaries as well. “It doesn’t hurt. It’s just a little inflamed.”

“A little inflamed—you never go to the doctor. I should go to the doctor with you today.”

“I can look after myself.” Cathy took out a black marker and drew a line around the infected area.

“If the infection spreads outside this line, make sure you go to a hospital.”

“You don’t have to be concerned about me.”¹⁶⁸

“Try to be sensible.¹⁶⁹ Don’t be so stubborn.”¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁸ Cf. Speaking to Prometheus, Io says, “Do not care for me more than I would have you” (Aeschylus, Line 629).

¹⁶⁹ Hermes says, “Bring your proud heart to know a true discretion—...” (Ibid, Lines 1000 – 1001).

¹⁷⁰ Hermes says, “Look, you, and reflect / and never think that obstinacy is better / than prudent counsel” (Ibid, Lines 1033 – 1035).

“You know me,” Peter said. “No one’s ever been able to tell me anything. I’ll be okay. This’ll be good for me. I can work on my stony qualities,” he said, referring to an old joke between them.¹⁷¹

“Promise me you’ll be careful,” she said. “Just catch a cab. The apartment is only a few blocks from the station.¹⁷² Get settled in, then go from there.”¹⁷³

¹⁷¹ From “The Ruby”: “Work on your stony qualities and become resplendent like the ruby” (Rumi, p. 14).

¹⁷² Cf. Prometheus’s directions to Io: “First turn to the sun’s rising and walk on / over the fields no plough has broken ...” (Aeschylus, Lines 707 – 708).

¹⁷³ Cf. Prometheus to Io says, [the river] “cross it not— / It is no stream that you can easily ford ...” (Ibid, Lines 717 – 718).

Part Two

Peter set his bags down and looked around the station. Another city.¹⁷⁴ *What is this place? Who are these people?*¹⁷⁵ He hadn't eaten since the night before. He'd always relied on Cathy to order food for them. Now he'd have to try speaking with some local folk.¹⁷⁶ Each time he'd tried conversing in the past week, he spent a few seconds preparing, suffering the buildup of anxiety, the flood of embarrassment as he revealed his incomprehension. "Non parlo Italiano. Non parlo Italiano," he'd repeated, an automaton's continuo. "Parla Inglese?" Peter decided he was no longer hungry. He approached a kiosk, however, and ordered a drink. He thanked the kind-looking server who'd spent some effort over the details of his Aperol Spritz. She replied simply, "*Prego, buona sera.*" Peter shook his head, not understanding. After repeating herself twice, she switched to English. Peter laughed.

"I'm sorry. I'm new here and I'm feeling a little lost. But I'm looking forward to seeing your city."

"Welcome to Bologna," she said, smiling. "I hope you enjoy your stay."

The building manager met Peter outside his place on _____ Avenue. He spoke little English. The two got along with an exchange of hand gestures, Peter repeating in Italian the last word or two of each phrase the man was saying on the short ride upstairs in the elevator. The manager, one Signor Carducci, smartly dressed in shirt and jacket, showed Peter his room, the shared kitchen, bathroom, common room. The two exchanged Euros and keys. At Carducci's leaving, Peter grasped the man's hand in both of his, bowing with pigeon-like movements. He clasped his hands together wagging them from side to side like a circus strong man. Carducci snorted amiably and left.

Peter reviewed his room, pleased to be enriching not the hoteliers, but the flophouseholders once again: a futon bed for two, pulled up with half of it against the wall for one, an old stuffed vinyl chair, a box television set. He unpacked and dumped some

¹⁷⁴ Io says, "my wanderings over land and sea" (Ibid, Line 585).

¹⁷⁵ Io says, "What land is this? What race of men?" (Ibid, Line 561).

¹⁷⁶ In "The Stones of Florence" McCarthy refers to visitors not interacting with the locals while in Italy (McCarthy, p. 15).

of his belongings on the table in the corner and surveyed them: a tourist map of Venice, a receipt for the Museo del Duomo, a ticket stub from the concert in Rome. Peter made up his bed and lay down on it without removing his shoes. He looked around the bare room at the hand-drawn map of Bologna on the wall—a student's room, he told himself. *I'm living a student's life.* He thought of Cathy briefly and exhaled. *Not a good use of my time.*

Phone in pocket, he prepared to set out. He closed the door to his room behind him, tested it, and found it was unlocked. There was no locking mechanism from the inside. He took out his set of keys, recognizing the front door security key, the kind he'd used his entire life; the others were skeleton and mortise keys, keys he'd never used. He tried the mortise with the same lustre as the lock face, but it floated in an empty chamber, not fitting into any mechanism. The other mortise fit, but it was stuck. No, the shiny key was it. Peter inserted it with the teeth facing up, facing down. He opened the door and came inside.

Peter then stepped out onto the veranda and looked out, like Telemachus, at the courtyard below. He sat down in a plastic chair trying to calm himself and took in what was before him. Both buildings framing the courtyard were made of brick, in the process of being plastered over and painted—green, yellow, brown. The ground below was deserted except for a car. Hanging from some windows opposite were pots of pink and red pansies. The veranda, some parts clean, others filthy, was enclosed by a plain wrought iron railing covered in mesh cloth. *To protect what: children, small animals?* No walls separated the sections of balcony in front of Peter's room and the others in the apartment. He looked in one of the windows then averted his eyes. The roof was of old tiles. On top sat an iron weathervane eagle. Some sheets hung on a line opposite. Lush plants sat in plastic or terra cotta pots; the ones on his side were overgrown, unkempt, going to seed. Some parts of the veranda were tidy; others were cluttered with bicycles, air conditioning units, floor fans, unidentifiable sun decayed plastic trash, a garden gnome. A mildewed awning was covered in netting: *to discourage pigeons?* Peter considered his ignorance of local bird species. Some windows to his right were set with black shutters—some open, others closed. He looked at the closed glass doors opposite, lined with parted sheers, revealing a dark interior with no recognizable shapes or objects. The complex as a whole suggested some kind of tenancy. Peter wondered about other possible occupants. It was midweek, the early evening air still. For now the

place seemed deserted. Water stains under the veranda above formed a menacing pattern of villi. Peter imagined it crashing down on him.

Back inside, he turned on the television, watched a few seconds of news, turned it off again, opened the bottle of wine Cathy had left him with, and sitting on the bed, drank half of it off at one pull, enjoying at first the expansive feeling this provided, then the delightful flattening of emotion this gave him,¹⁷⁷ his range of consciousness getting smaller and smaller.¹⁷⁸

Peter looked at the mirror across from him, ran his hands through his hair, and resolved to try going out once again. He walked to the door, inhaled and exhaled, trying to erase his earlier experience with the lock from his mind, almost tripping on an odd-looking door stop. Peter closed the door purposefully and placed the key in the lock with the same result as before. He rattled the key violently, fibrillating it in the lock. His earlier worries about his functional illiteracy in Italy diminished in the face of this basic inability to function. Peter shouted under his breath. "Why does this always happen to me?" Nothing of this kind had, of course, ever happened to Peter before, but this fact did little to ameliorate his acute annoyance. He considered staying in for the evening and starting anew in the morning. No. Peter tried to recall the details of his meeting with Carducci. In going over the working of the place, Carducci had repeated the word, "capiche," but Peter Stone obviously did not capiche. Instead he'd nodded and grinned like a monkey before a superior foe. Peter recalled somehow a gesture the manager had made with the key, like a martini drinker with his olive toothpick mimicking a fencer: the key needed to be inserted just part way into the lock. And so keeping the key level, and using what he imagined to be a safecracker's subtlety, Peter tried again. The teeth found the lacunae in the mechanism; he turned the key, it struck home, and the lock clicked shut. No problem, he thought looking to his left and right, flooding with relief, shaking the knob energetically, ensuring it was secure. He let himself out at the end of the hall. The heavy door closed with a reassuring thud. Peter closed the screen door, realizing this too needed to be locked from the outside. Then seeing a screen door left open at an

¹⁷⁷ In *1984*, Orwell speaks of alcohol as a flattener of emotion (Orwell, p. 338).

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, (p. 60).

adjacent apartment, he decided to leave it be. Approaching the elevator, Peter thought for a moment and took the stairs.

Passing a monument to some historic, but to our protagonist unknowable, acts of violence and heroism, Peter walked to the Piazza Maggiore. Florence, Venice, and Rome of the past week were all dominated by their specifics of colour. It was true of this place as well. Warm earth tones. Peter thought with certainty that Bologna suited him best. He was finally in a place akin to his own psychic element.¹⁷⁹ He walked further and found an open market, wandering for a while among racks of clothing, returning the friendly nods of immigrant vendors. He bought himself a cotton gingham shirt for a few Euros. The exchange buoyed him. Peter kept walking but felt at a loss of what to do. He still had his book: he could keep reading. But no. He could read on his return flight in a couple of days. Pausing in front of a movie theatre, he learned that a film was starting in twenty minutes.¹⁸⁰ The thought of darkness and air conditioning appealed to him. During the show, he understood little but persevered. It was an older release set in Milan.¹⁸¹ He tried not to think of Cathy. There was violence but not the cartoonish violence he loved in the gangster films he'd seen again and again. This felt more like a documentary than a work of fiction and Peter was unable to experience that sense of romance he'd enjoyed when watching American interpretations of Italian life. The theatre was almost empty. He left just before the film ended.

Peter felt a change in the weather coming: the heat stayed, the air was close. He sat on a bench in the dull glare of streetlights listening to and watching the street sweepers clean up the rubbish-strewn marketplace. The wind urged couples and single walkers on their way. Plastic and paper detritus skittered along the brickwork marring its pattern. The gusts swirled up dust in dizzying eddies; the blasts battled with each other in attacks and counterattacks.¹⁸² Lightning forked above him illuminating the square weirdly, and thunder rumbled in the distance. Sheets of cardboard were stacked at the bases of dumpsters. He would welcome some rain. He stood and walked, hands thrust in his pockets. The thought of going directly home made him feel a failure. He strolled

¹⁷⁹ Scappettone writes about feeling not *for* but *through* something (Scappettone p. 131).

¹⁸⁰ During his April 29, 2016 lecture, Professor Garfinkle asserted that before the First World War, Italy was a leader of the motion picture industry.

¹⁸¹ Stone is watching Matteo Garrone's *Gomorra* from 2008, set in Milan.

¹⁸² Cf. Prometheus's final words (Aeschylus, Lines 1080 – 1093).

back to the Maggiore. He sat down at the Fountain of Neptune looking up at the water god in the semi-darkness, all muscles and might.

Peter returned to his room and lay on the bed, not trying for sleep. He drank the rest of the Barolo sitting on the floor, his back against the wall, his legs stretched out before him. He took out his phone and looked at his blog. He had several dozen followers. He was encouraged by some of the responses suggesting that he was funny. But most disappointed him. Their comments were neutral: terse to the point of cryptic, or as sardonic as his posts. Peter was suddenly angry. What a waste this trip had all been. He looked around his tiny room, dimly lit by the bedside lamp. He put his hand on the back of his hurting knee. The effort, the futility—the same was true of his blog, his Italian experience writ small. Peter was about to take it all down and be done with it before impulsively writing the following.

“This Hateful Country”¹⁸³

“Enough! That’s it. I’ve had it. I’m done with this place. Everyone goes on about how great everything is, but I’m definitely not feeling it. It’s too hot—I can’t sleep, and I’m sick with this thing, this blight. It stings me¹⁸⁴ and won’t go away! There’s something wrong with me and I don’t know what to do about it. I don’t want to go to another doctor here. I came with my girlfriend but now she’s gone. I feel everything’s just falling apart all around me. I’ve got this ringing in my ears. I don’t understand these people and the weather is driving me crazy. I’d like to tear up the paintings, smash all the statues. The pressure just builds and never lets up. I can’t sleep and I can’t stop shaking. I wish this was over. I wish I could just go home and sleep in my own place again.”

Peter posted what he’d written and lay for a while in a stupor on top of the bed. He thought of the night his father left. He couldn’t remember when it started. Robert had begun missing dinners. His work in the Ministry of Health, something about information management, data security, was keeping him late. Then he started to be away on weekends. Both his parents seemed to distance themselves from him. On the day of his tenth birthday, Peter was excited about the special dinner they’d be having. But when it became apparent that Robert wouldn’t be joining them, Peter left his rib-eye steak

¹⁸³ Cf. MW Shelley in her June 29, 1819 letter to Marianne Hunt (Bennett, p. 286).

¹⁸⁴ Cf. Io, speaking of her own torment (Aeschylus, line 566).

untouched and went to his room. Olive slept with Peter in his room that night, her breath a dyspneac rustle in his ear. His father came into his room later. “I’m sorry, buddy. I’ve got to go away for a while. I’ll come back and see you in a couple of weeks. That’s a stone ginger.” And Peter, who’d never been an easy sleeper, began to keep a light on in his room again, for the first time in years.

Peter woke and reviewed his pictures, swiping through them deleting as he went. He couldn’t bear to look at the ones of himself. He eyes—the mixture of hostility and cowardice: the pictures revealed something he knew was there but couldn’t see, something chaotic.¹⁸⁵ Peter pressed the reverse button on the camera screen. He regarded himself in various expressions, a smile, a frown, a look of optimism. He turned it off, frustrated that he could never see directly into his eyes. Something felt wrong with the light. He went to the kitchen and took a candle in a wine bottle from the windowsill. He lighted it with the flame from the gas stove and brought it back to his room.¹⁸⁶ In this light he lay back down on the bed. Somewhere in the night outside his window, he heard the sound of a woman moaning in pleasure. Peter listened for an interval until it stopped. He was mildly aroused, but for once, neglecting his vasocongestion and the pursuit of certain rhythmic and peristaltic contractions of skeletal muscles in the perianum, declined to touch himself.

At last the rain came. Peter went to the window and looked down at the courtyard. A familiar and satisfying smell came to him from below. The rain came in waves. The wind grew. Three young people, laughing and shouting, ran through the courtyard. *At least some people are having fun.* He thought about his life.

Italy asks the visitor to examine the past, and Peter had as much trouble examining his own past as he did of the country in which he was a guest. And he didn’t like what Cathy had once described as the Italian notion of nobility.¹⁸⁷ Peter felt little sense of nobility where he and his own family were concerned and had trouble with the very notion of family itself. Robert, whom Peter explicitly reviled, had his two other

¹⁸⁵ In his November 24, 2016 lecture on Walter Benjamin, Professor McCarron asserted that the camera points us to hidden depths that the naked eye can’t get to. It reveals the hidden unconscious, like psychoanalysis.

¹⁸⁶ Cf. The oil lamp doesn’t violate the night (Kohák, p. 34).

¹⁸⁷ EB Browning refers to Michelangelo and the notion of nobility in “Casa Guidi Windows” (EB Browning, p. 24).

children.¹⁸⁸ Peter was supercilious with his half-brothers and merciless with Robert. He thought of this as he lay in the comforting light of the candle. Two days after his 30th birthday, Peter arrived, well oiled, at the door of his father's house with Linda, his then girlfriend in her ash blond up-do, for what he thought was a simple gathering. When they entered the living room, and everyone shouted surprise, Peter responded quickly and imperceptibly (you'd need a camera to catch it, the muscles of his upper lip lifting into a scowl, his face contorting for a moment) before regaining his equilibrium after the alarm at seeing in the people before him the disparate parts of his life in the same room: and in a wink he went on the attack.

"Whoawhoa-happybirthdayhappybirthdayhappybirthday!" He embraced and kissed Susan, the young mother of his half siblings, on the lips, holding his hand on her belly, calling her Suzanne. "Good of you to come," he said to the room. "Thank you for coming. Happy Birthday! Yes, very happy," he said to each person he greeted, kissing them European style on each cheek, taking open-mouthed selfies with all who came near. "Whoa, Dad, look at you, have you lost weight. Look at this guy," he shouted to the room like a motivational speaker. He took his father's sling glass from him, quaffed the highball, and was then speaking into it like a microphone. "Have you been hitting the gym? Now this is surprising, a pleasant surprise," he said raising his eyebrows at Susan. "Here I am, father, give me your blessing." Peter spotted his old friend from work and pointed at him in mock accusation: "*et tu*, John, *et tu!*" Finally aware of Carol and Olive alone in a corner, Peter walked slowly toward them, his arms spread out like Cristo Redentor, "Ladies and Gentlemen, the Rolling Stones." Peter embraced them in a huddle, picked them both up and sent the three of them collapsing to the floor. He looked up laughing at his father's grave face.

"You always were too clever for your own good."¹⁸⁹ Someone turned up the music and some people started to dance. Peter found Linda and pulled her into the bathroom closing the door.

"Hello big boy," she said her eyes a gleam.

¹⁸⁸ EB Browning refers to the idea of youth held back by the aged (Ibid, p. 29).

¹⁸⁹ Cf. "Just such the obstinacy that brought you here," spoken by Hermes (Aeschylus, Line 964).

“We have to go,” said Peter. Linda cocked her head and drew her mouth together humorously, her eyes shining. “Take me home,” he said. Her eyes dimmed. “So help me God—take me home or I am going to seriously lose my shit.”

He was having problems with his family, and his friendship with John was of little help. Peter said little to John about Linda. And if he was contemptuous of his father, he spoke to his friend of his mother in the most excoriating of terms, complaining in a half-articulate passion. “Her obsession with these fictional characters in the Old Testament—Ruth, Hannah, Sarah, Rebecca—it’s crazy.”

“Hard cheese, old chap,” said John, putting his hand on Peter’s shoulder as they walked out of the store one day on a lunch break. Peter flinched, salivating with anger.

“And her volunteering. Her life is falling apart and all she wants to do is work for the church. She practically lives there.”

“Well, it’s probably not a bad idea, the cost of housing these days,” said John flatly. Peter scoffed and John continued. “Volunteering enriches everyone, the helper and the helped. Imagine what it would do for your relationship if you dropped by her church one night to help out. You’re old enough to start forgiving her.”

A year later when John came into some money, he told Peter of his plan to open his own pharmacy. He asked Peter to join him. “You’re smart. It wouldn’t take much for you to get your pharmacy tech. And it would be great to work together.” But Peter told John he was too old to learn something new. And he couldn’t be moved. John quit work to go off and do his own thing in the suburbs. Peter tried to show enthusiasm for his friend’s success. But his articulations of “Wow. You’re really doing it, I mean, look at you” were like an obstruction in his bowels and things never really felt the same. Peter felt he had no option but to put some distance between the two of them, and after several unanswered calls over the next season, John stopped trying.

Peter opened the door and cool air rushed into the room. The candle faltered. He wet his fingers and put it out. He removed his clothes, got under the blankets, and immediately fell asleep.

A few hours later, Peter woke with a pang. In his dream seconds earlier, he and Cathy were on the grounds of the Villa Borghese, playing, laughing on the grass with

Matthias. Peter felt secure in Cathy's love for him and he had a great new friend in Matthias. They played like children holding hands, dancing in circles. Peter was carrying them both, with Matthias on his back and Cathy on top. They shouted with pleasure as they fell to the ground laughing. They lay with their heads on each other's bellies, the heaving laughter causing yet more laughter. The jealousy was gone and Peter was filled with a profound relief and fond feeling toward his new friend—*when have I ever had such a good male friend?* Matthias lay on his side resting on one arm looking sincerely into Peter's eyes. Matthias kissed him softly on the lips; he closed his eyes and put his hand on Peter's chest and ran his fingers across it. Cathy lay down opposite and kissed Peter hard on the mouth. He moved as if to kiss her back. Suddenly Matthias opened his eyes and looked firmly at him. Peter felt a pressure as Matthias reached into his chest and pulled out his heart, giving it to Cathy. Not conscious of any pain but only rather of the most acute feeling of betrayal, Peter tried to speak but couldn't, emitting inhuman cries instead. Matthias kept his hand over where his heart had been. Peter couldn't move, nor could he shut his eyes against this scene. Cathy held his heart, caressing it against her cheek. She looked at him and parted her lips, Peter aware of her hot breath on his still beating disinterred heart. And with a look of infinite beauty, she slowly drew her tongue across it. A noise sounded in Peter's ears like that of an animal crying. With an expression of immense longing and desire, Cathy aggressively pushed the heart into her mouth and turning her head a little as she did, bit down forcefully into it.¹⁹⁰ And in that disorienting place between waking and sleep, Peter became aware of a grating bird song, "O, O,"¹⁹¹ outside his window, "*eleleu, eleleu.*"¹⁹² Peter let himself lie still for a few minutes with his eyelids lowered, his pulse gradually decelerating, the pressure in his head easing. The room was bright with daylight. Peter arranged and smoothed the bed cover over himself.

Lovesick, taken out of himself, his dopamine inhibited past obscured by love endorphins, he was open, plastic, invincible.¹⁹³ There was nothing he couldn't do. He sat up, smelled under his arm, saw sudden beauty in the wrinkled sheets about him. No

¹⁹⁰ In *La Vita Nuova*, Dante writes a sonnet that describes a dream he's had—"Love is a Dreadful Lord"—in which the figure of Love pulls out Dante's heart. In the dream sleeping Beatrice wakes and eats the heart (*La Vita Nuova*, p. 14).

¹⁹¹ Io says this in her torment (Aeschylus, Line 741).

¹⁹² "Alas, alas," another cry of lamentation from Io (Ibid, Line 877).

¹⁹³ EB Browning writes of the narcotic of love, which leads to greatness (EB Browning, p. 44).

need to eat or drink, just the need to be with her. On a whim, he texted Cathy with a nonchalant, “Greetings from Bologna,” telling her that he was having a good time, spending half a minute choosing what he thought was the most appropriate Emoji, settling on a smiley face with a rectangular mouth full of teeth. Peter lay there for another twenty minutes. He knew she wouldn’t reply. And when she didn’t, he consoled himself with an hour-long meditation on the idea that she was not his type. He looked at some photos of them and recoiled.¹⁹⁴ Did his body really look like that?—so thin and toneless compared to the statuary of the muscular ancients. In each of the photos, there was no doubt that Cathy was pleased. But Peter looked distracted, somehow always frozen in the middle of an unattractive gesture: his eyes half closed, there but not there. His leg hurt. He took a shower and reviewed himself in the mirror. Peter had to admit he was looking unwell.¹⁹⁵ He smothered this dissonance recalling Cathy’s response to the sight of grimacing figures in the museums. “God loves the look of pain more than repose.”¹⁹⁶ He tried smiling. But there was no spark in his expression,¹⁹⁷ no charm: his mother’s eyes, his father’s mouth.

It wasn’t that he didn’t respect his parents. There was conflict, as there must be, but it was something else he’d never been able to name. A psychologist, a psychiatrist, or some other grandee of his age might have used the words “fragile attachment” but Peter knew this wasn’t true either. He was secure with them, whatever happened. The problem was that for some reason neither his mother nor father was charmed by him. Charm: so soft and delightful: that playful combination of humour and the absurd.¹⁹⁸ To be sure, his parents had found many things about him absurd: his mispronunciations as he learned to speak and his want of physical coordination as he learned to walk—these were absurd. His parents did tell stories about these. But his misshapen vowels, his broken consonant clusters—the slowly developing musculature of the organs of speech and his deficits of proprioception were not humorous to them.

¹⁹⁴ EB Browning writes of the sculptor recoiling from the subject (Ibid, p. 43).

¹⁹⁵ Robert Browning, in “Fra Lippo Lippi” writes of painting the soul via the body (R. Browning, p. 74).

¹⁹⁶ In “Casa Guidi Windows,” EB Browning asserts that God loves the look of pain more than repose (EB Browning, p. 42).

¹⁹⁷ Pater refers to what he calls Giorgione’s spark of divine fire (Pater, p. 95).

¹⁹⁸ Cleanth Brooks asserts that charm comes from absurdity (Brooks, p. 90).

Somewhere once late in his stage of concrete operations, Peter was struck by a flash of understanding: maybe he could make them laugh. And with this, he would take them on a journey back to happier times, back through his earlier preoperational stages, back to the carefree times of his infancy. It would be difficult but maybe Olive and he could do this together. They would make his parents see charm.¹⁹⁹ His parents weren't unpleasant but they didn't laugh much. So Peter didn't laugh. They were a studious and quiet couple and didn't speak to him much either. And as he grew older, he realized he wouldn't be able to take them back to see one of his more charming earlier selves. His parents would not get back together. And he sensed in the unknowing knowing genius of childhood that going back in time, even back to prenatal, fetal, and embryonic stages, falling back even into generations of past lives with them—exchanging roles in the family constellation: sometimes a parent, sometimes a child—could not have changed a thing. Peter was actually in possession of a great capacity for expression but as he grew older, his own shrinking capacity for emotional and linguistic expression made it difficult for Peter to see anything charming about them. And his inability to find an outlet for his expression turned this fluid potentiality to bile, which formed in a short time into a crystalline calculus, which has galled him ever since.

Peter turned on the TV. More news. There'd been an earthquake. A map on the screen showed a town far south of Bologna, some place he'd never heard of with a name he couldn't compel himself to remember. He watched the footage. The unsteadiness of the scene—he wondered whether it was an amateur's handheld effort, *or was the earth actually shaking?* An alarm was sounding throughout. It looked hot there, arid and dusty. An image appeared from the Italian National Seismic Network, a seismograph and stylus with a jagged paper-roll printout, a Richter-Scale figure. Peter shook his head in sympathy at a ruined building, several floors collapsed, a closed accordion bellows. Paramedics, police, members of the armed forces, members of the public were digging with excavators, hand tools, gloved or bare handed for the wounded, the dead, intimates or strangers, their feelings of neutral anonymity, turning with the minutes to desperate love. Peter turned it off.

¹⁹⁹ Cf. Children are open to things that adults are lost to (Ibid, p. 144).

He got dressed. With no particular plan, and having mastered the riddle of yesterday's keys and locks, he went out, passed the market, once again filled with people and free of yesterday evening's debris. He continued and eventually came across the language school where Cathy had registered them for lessons. Peter had not understood this. "We're only here for a couple of days."

"Why not try to meet someone?" she'd countered. "It's a great way to meet people from around the world." Peter entered the building feeling he had nothing to lose. He walked up a flight of stairs past several students, each younger than him. He approached the receptionist's desk, introduced himself, and reported that neither he nor Cathy would be attending classes. The receptionist asked him to wait, left, and returned with an instructor, one Signora Berio. She bullied and flattered him.

"Peter Stone, such a wonderful name. Why don't you come with me?" she said taking him arm in arm dragging him down the hallway deaf to his protests that his Italian wasn't good enough. They came to a small classroom filled with international students and refugees. He was led to a seat, given paper and pencil, and spent the next seventy minutes listening to dialogues and trying to recreate these with members of his new cohort. Peter spent much of the time looking at his classmates' feet, but did his bit, introduced himself and exchanged observations about the weather with a young woman named Natcha from Thailand. A lesson about ordering in restaurants was coming up next, and shopping for groceries that afternoon. Peter left at the break without saying goodbye.

He wandered about and sat by a statue of Cleopatra taking her own life, unsure of what to do next. He looked at his phone, checking his blog. Something was happening. There were a lot of comments, over two hundred of them since he'd last checked. They were about the earthquake. Peter suddenly felt the temperature drop several degrees. The commentators were conflating his criticism of the cities in recent posts with the destruction wrought by natural disaster. He reviewed what he'd written. *How could they misunderstand? I guess I was a bit caddish, but...* Peter spent a minute looking, not even trying with the Italian commentary: the ones in English were enough: it was negative. Peter made a fist and clenched his jaw, clamping his teeth together. He relaxed. He resolved that it was no big deal. He was a big boy, he reasoned. He could take it. He deserved it. He could be a receptacle for their outrage. He would wear it like a

badge. Peter reviewed more of the comments. Most of the language was pretty unimaginative. But a few of the writers were artists, much better than him. He nodded in admiration at the well-chosen word, the playfulness of their collocations in their endless arrangements.

Peter closed his blog and looked at a photo from the Forum, a mistake taken in the glare of the sun. Just the top of some ruins were visible. Most of it was sky. He thought of Linda and her savant-like knowledge of colour, the way she used to tease him, assigning CKMY numbers to whatever he might be wearing, holding, sitting on. He looked at the sky above him, his hand over his brow and thought of some of the colours she'd told him about—Tiffany, Verdigris, Waterspout, Zaffre.

Peter wandered back to his apartment and made himself some coffee. He sipped his drink watching the TV: continuing news about the earthquake. In addition to this morning's footage, there were now statistics: numbers of homeless, injured, missing, dead. He looked at his blog again. More comments. Peter wondered about it. Maybe it was going viral. *No. Probably not enough for that.* But his words had angered many, making them sick. Followers were dog-piling on. He scrolled down. There were threats. That's okay, he thought, drawing up a psychic wall around him. *There's no fate that can't be overcome with scorn.*²⁰⁰ He looked at it again and considered for a while the whole thing unfair. But he knew he deserved it. When he was younger, he'd trashed a former instructor on "rate my professor" and even attacked his former family doctor on "rate my md" just to see what it felt like.

In the late fall of Peter's third grade, his grandmother died. Hospitals: smells of disinfectant, food, human waste: his mother suddenly preparing for her own mother's premature end of life. Peter recalled Carol madly searching for coins in her purse and finally surrendering the keys, "There's some change in the cup holder. I need you to go out and put some in the meter." But during this visit to his grandmother, it had become dark. Peter walked up and down the side streets but couldn't find the car. And after fifteen minutes, he gave up. The boy returned through a different door from which he'd left. His mother finally spotted him at a nursing station. "Where were you?" she said pushing his jacket at him, pulling Olive behind her. She roughly grabbed the keys out of

²⁰⁰ There's no fate that can't be surmounted by scorn (Camus, p. 109).

his hand, the edge of the key ring snagging on his finger. When they returned to the car, she snatched the ticket out from under the windshield wiper and, in an unlikely gesture, turned up a classic rock song to listen to on the radio as she drove them home.

Peter sat down in the vinyl chair, tossing his phone on to the bed. He couldn't remember any more visits to the hospital, scarcely recalled his grandmother's funeral, and indeed, had few memories of his grandmother at all.²⁰¹

What he did remember was his mother ageing, the lost decades of her own mother's life weighing on her. She stopped eating and lost 20kg. Her hair, the smell of which Peter suddenly became aware, went gray in a very short time, and she covered it often with a shawl. Her hands became red, her knuckles cracked in her new attention to hygiene and housework. She seemed to not change clothes anymore and wore the same frequently laundered thrift store fleece sweat suit like a second skin. For Peter, each change marked some new decay, his helpless question, "Is this how it's going to be now?" never asked. Dinners became single dish affairs. His father got busy, very busy, at work.

Peter played with his sister Olive: she with his Furby, he with her Big Bird. He would peck at hers until she screwed up her nose. Then he would make the figures dance and she laughed. He made them cup noodles to eat in his room together.

Unaware of how much time had passed, he got up and walked to the kitchen with the indistinct feeling of wanting something to eat. But then he saw something that made him forget about food. On a wall beside a corkboard with a list of house rules, was a whiteboard filled, by more than one artist, with drawings: loving caricatures, by people who obviously cared for each other—his hidden roommates, or former tenants, who might have been his acquaintances had he been here at an earlier time, had he been a different person.

Centuries ago in Bologna, it had been Latin, the common language at the university, used by students from all over the world. Now it was English. In addition to the illustrations were messages, a-grammatical—but showing kindness and affection. Looking at these, Peter recognized them for what they were: more moving than any

²⁰¹ EB Browning states that we need the dead's benisons: without them, we're orphans (EB Browning, p. 36).

other artifact he'd seen in the country. Peter wished he could write something of his own. "Hello to you; I wish you well." But as a monoglot English speaker, he sensed he had no right. He wasn't even here to study. He thought about his blog. *No kind words for me.* For a moment he thought about Linda.

Linda discovered she was pregnant, and toward the end of the first trimester, during dinner at her place, told Peter. He'd had no experience with this. And he was not prepared. He was thinking of TV shows and what the scriptwriters of police and hospital dramas put in the mouths of the characters: 1) *Was it his?* She was telling him. Of course it must be his. 2) *How did this happen?* Well how on earth did he think it happened, stupid. 3) *What are you going to do?* No, he couldn't say that. 4) *Do you want to keep it?* Keep it, IT. What a thing to say. 5) *When did this happen?* They'd been together five months. When did he think it happened? Finally he managed, "Wow, I mean, look at you." He looked at her. She was obviously delighted. "How are you?" She was fine. "Have you been to the doctor?" She had. "Have you told anyone?" Peter was the first. He stood up, walked around the room running his hands through his hair, breathing quickly, exhaling forcefully, on the edge of hyperventilation.

"It's normal to feel freaked out. It's okay. It'll be okay." They visited her parents; he told them about his work. Linda asked Peter about meeting his parents. He imagined their reaction to the news.

"We've had a bit of a cold war going on for a while."

"You're not like your father."

"They're a bunch of robots."

"They can't be any worse than mine."

Peter was suddenly struck with an acute desire to do something good. He could go out again later, but for now he wanted to perform some small act of charity. He didn't know the other people in this place; he couldn't know them, these message writers, these portraitists. But he could do something for them. Peter went into the bathroom: he surveyed the exhausted tubes of toothpaste, the innumerable containers of almost empty body washes, shower gels, conditioners, a box of Epsom salts, no bathmat, no tub mat, an opaque fixed splash guard reaching halfway along the tub, a high shower

nozzle with a long umbilicus, soap scum and hair in the drain, an ancient razor, rinds of soap bars littering the ledges above the tub and sink. The dishwashing gloves were too small, so he did without, discarding the most unpromising items.

Five days after their visit to the home of Linda's parents, she miscarried. She stayed in bed for ten days, not bathing or changing her clothes. During this time, Peter was a model of husbandry and concern. He brought her homemade soups, he did her laundry, he brought her ice packs, he read to her, he found a phone number and offered to visit a counsellor with her; he even spoke to Linda's mother on the phone and bore the weight of this new unsought solicitude as he was thanked for looking after her daughter. He was great; he was too good to be true—Peter enjoyed his hero status. But he was too good to be true. This softening of Peter's reserve was, after all, not thoughtfulness but, in the end, just so much relief. And he hoped it didn't show. He said the right things: "It's a common thing this early in a pregnancy—as many as twenty percent of pregnancies end in miscarriages—of course we'll still move in together—we can try again." And then in a dramatic aria of sympathy—"as sad, as hard as this has been, I'm grateful to feel this much closer to you."

Peter wiped down all the dirty, mildewed places he could reach and collected the hair and accumulation from the tub drain. Peter took off his socks and shoes, climbed into the tub and scrubbed it. He did his best with the filth-caked splash guard, his hands now pruned and red. He finished by mopping the floor tiles.

Before he went out, Peter did a double take at the bizarre, girl-with-horns doorstop. He picked it up, examined it, curled it like a weightlifter. He paced the streets in his characteristic manner. Peter looked covetously at delicious-looking panini in the windows of shops, but was overcome by misgivings about not speaking the language. He didn't want to point and ape, and neither did he wish to call attention to himself, involuntarily declaring himself a stranger through errors in pronunciation and syntax. He thought again and again about the five or eight words he might say. With the dozen or so mistakes he could possibly make in saying them, Peter felt he had a much better chance of ordering incorrectly than not. At one point he decided he should just go ahead and order. No one would mind. There was no shame in it, he reasoned to himself. But the second he thought this, a contradictory thought would rise up like some gastroesophageal reflux. Besides, he didn't know how to ask to have a sandwich grilled.

He stood in the door of an empty coffee shop unable to leave, unable to enter, unable to leave until a woman at the counter asked whether she could help him. Peter shook his head looking at the floor and left. For a few minutes, Peter entertained a vision of himself rubbing his belly, licking his lips, pointing to his open mouth saying “hungry.” Peter rehearsed simple phrases he knew again and again, but the possible errors he might make, like so many potential combinations of pieces of a chessboard, seemed to stretch out into time without end. His fear of appearing ridiculous and his despair at being his own self gripped him in a paralysis as he moved from shop to shop.²⁰² At a fried chicken outlet, Peter examined the menu. The cashier saw the rictus of helplessness on his face, the look of craven accusation in his eyes. “How are you?” the man asked in English. Peter almost fainted with gratitude as he was invited to sit at one of the empty tables. But he took his order to go and ate his lunch sitting alone on a bus stop bench.

On the day of their planned visit with Linda with his mother, Peter, in another bid to avoid this taxing engagement, put on a mask of consideration. “Are you sure you’re up for this? We can put it off. She’ll totally understand.”

“I’m okay,” said Linda. “But thank you. It means a lot to me.” At his old home, Peter sniffed the air—the dust of vacuum cleaner bags, boiled kidney beans. Carol hugged Linda and considered her smiling.

“Peter’s never brought anyone over before.”

“They have to grow up some time, don’t they,” said Linda. Carol’s face was soft. While Peter was in the kitchen fixing them a drink, Linda started to cry.

“What’s wrong, dear?” said Carol passing the tissues on the coffee table.

“It’s nothing. I’m okay. It’s just a lot harder than I thought it’d be.” Carol mouthed Linda’s last few words, wondering what to say. Into the room came Peter, sloshing and spilling the drinks before setting them down on to coasters. He sat down beside his girlfriend, his hand on the back of her neck, speaking with as much gravitas as he could muster.

²⁰² Sartre suggests we are unable to transcend our own subjectivity (Sartre, p. 23).

“Linda was pregnant and she lost the baby.”

“Oh, I’m so sorry sweetheart.” Carol moved from her chair to the chesterfield and sat on the other side of Linda, taking the young woman’s hands in her own. Carol told Linda of her own two miscarriages. Peter sat there mute, rubbing his girlfriend’s back mechanically with a news-to-me expression on his face.

Before dessert, Linda apologized to Carol telling her she still wasn’t feeling well. “Of course, why don’t we do this again when you’re feeling better? In the meantime,” Carol said, glancing at her son, “we’ll keep trying to help people grow up.” In the car on the way home, Peter finally broke the clotted silence.

“Is everything okay? I thought things were going pretty well.” Linda let him continue. “I think she really likes you.”

“You didn’t tell her?”

“I—”

“You didn’t tell her.” Peter quickly recovered from his initial confusion, and finding himself in a position in which he’d found himself so many times before, began to dig: It was too early. He’d wanted to tell his mother in person but they couldn’t agree on a time to visit. It didn’t matter that all his digging had never once got himself out of a situation like this. He had a nice shovel and he liked to dig, in his unsurprising way: but then an astonishing inspiration: (parodying some piece of stigmatized, superseded knowledge he’d heard someone express once at work) “announcing a pregnancy during the first trimester is bad luck.” But Linda was having none of it.

“Did she even know about me?”

“She saw you at the party,” he said. She started to cry. Peter might have said something kind then, but he kept digging—“I was going to tell her after your next doctor’s appointment,” the eyeless spade of his argument slashing at the flower of her devotion.²⁰³

²⁰³ Cf. “... blind to the love / as the passing plough-blade slashes the flower ...” (Catullus, Poem 11, p. 64).

“Did she even know who I was?” For once Peter was silent. “You have no idea how much I loved you,” she said, furiously wiping the tears from the underside of her chin with the back of her hand.

In the following weeks, none of his texts or calls, or attempted calls to her place of work, had any effect. And after finally getting a subjectless email from Linda telling him in five words, a hackneyed phrase of hate and horror, that it was over, Peter stopped trying.²⁰⁴

Peter finished his lunch. His leg wasn't feeling any better, but he thought he could endure it.²⁰⁵ He crumpled his refuse, forcing it into a bin, and walked without direction. Eager to avoid the humiliating debacle of his take-out meal, he resolved to cook for himself that evening, have a meal in his place. He needed to go shopping. Peter looked at his tourist map. There were train and bus stations. A hospital, a police station, lots of monuments: he could get to these. Peter considered asking someone for directions, but the memory of the past hour put him off even the simplest of exchanges. Quite by chance, Peter found a Supermercato not far from his place. From the outside, it didn't look like much, just a simple door, a small sign above a narrow entranceway. But this trachea led to primary, secondary, and tertiary bronchi—departments of an extensive market, crowded with shoppers. Peter marvelled at the bottles of wine for two and three Euros. A money-saving instinct learned from his mother a quarter century ago stirred in him and he picked up a bottle of Chianti. He walked the aisles and surveyed the products noting the local and imported goods, some in the original (Colgate) others translated (*la mucca che ride*). He gathered a carton of eggs, a piece of mozzarella, a couple of tomatoes. He waited in a long vein of customers and when he arrived at the register, he smiled at the harried cashier. Peter placed his items on the counter, stacked his basket and was fishing in his wallet for bills when the clerk told him he would have to weigh the tomatoes.

Peter looked at the line-up behind him and to the impassive cashier. He left his remaining goods with her and made his way back to the produce section and saw a small line up at each of the scales. Unfamiliar with local shopping practices, he

²⁰⁴ Cf. Aschenbach's "Hackneyed phrase of love and longing," [for Tadzio] (Mann, p. 55).

²⁰⁵ Nature helps us absorb not avoid pain (Kohák, p. 43).

considered the prosaic task before him, afraid there might be some Italian or EU method of writing the weight on the tag that he didn't know about. Cathy would have known. He scoffed at himself, thinking back to the language class earlier in the day that he'd ditched so cavalierly. Peter stood for a minute trying to observe what others were doing. He looked around him: mothers with children, families, singletons: a young couple was laughing. A middle-aged man on his own nodded to Peter, who responded "*Salve*," wishing he could present his produce to this man, communicate with him in dumb show. He smiled, but declined to ask for help. Peter thought about it, but each possible solution seemed to hold some new and secret, hostile unknown that would expose his ignorance and deliver reproach upon him. When his turn came at the scale he decided against it, put back the tomatoes, and found instead a bulb of fennel in a labelled plastic package—*no need to weigh this*.

Peter strode with new confidence toward the cashier who beckoned him to approach ahead of the others. He nodded to the waiting customers closing his eyes. When she asked him what he'd done with the tomatoes, all Peter could manage was the word, "*occupado*," pointing with his chin toward the district of the vegetables. When he gave her a hundred Euro note for his small purchase, he sensed her waning patience as she asked whether he had anything smaller. Peter shook his head and felt his face go hot. A shopper near him switched his laden basket to his other hand. Peter perceived a murmuring from the people in line behind him and trembled slightly at his flashing and unreasonable thought that these strangers somehow knew about his hated blog. He fumbled with the returned bills as he tried to stuff them into his wallet and dropped some coins that clattered on the metal counter. He scooped them up as fast as he could, ignoring the ones that fell to the floor. The chyme of his shame gurgled to the back of his throat.

Peter hurried out of the store cursing himself, now perhaps a little less unreasonably (since yesterday's boondoggle with the keys) as to why "this kind of thing" was always happening to him. And it took one hour and fifteen minutes of rapid walking for his flight response—the events of the past week having depleted most of his resources on the fight side of things—for his vital signs to return to normal.

As he walked, Peter understood the impossibility of his returning to his apartment just then. He just couldn't bear the thought of existing with himself indoors at that

moment. He needed to be out of doors in nature. Peter consulted his map. The Giardini Margherita was a walkable distance and Peter made his way toward it.

He sat down under a tree. He tried to massage the back of his leg and gave up wincing. He opened and drank from his bottle of wine. He took off his shoes and socks and enjoyed the feeling of grass beneath his feet, sinking into the anodyne effects of his drink. As the sun set, Peter became sleepy. He lay down in the grass making a pillow of his shirt and looked up into the branches of his tree. "Love is a tree and lovers are its shade." He recalled Cathy saying this to him once on a picnic.²⁰⁶ He felt a faint humming in his ears and closed his eyes.²⁰⁷ He imagined he was alone²⁰⁸ in absolute quiet.²⁰⁹ With an arm over his eyes, Peter fell into a calm sleep, lost on a river of forgetfulness.²¹⁰ Later, when he woke, despite the light pollution from the city, stars were visible.²¹¹ Peter moved out from under the canopy of branches and lay down again to look at them. He thought about the age of the city, the centuries people had been there, perhaps in the very place he lay, looking up at the night sky as the patriarchs had seen it.²¹² He returned to his lodgings. His face was a little sunburnt. He was hungry and ate his scrambled eggs, content in anticipation of the chance for a sanguine mood on his final day in the country.

Peter had fallen into a light sleep but was woken, as on the previous night, by the unmistakable sounds of female physical bliss. After last night's abstinence, Peter set to work in service, and sincere pursuit of, let us be frank, certain *funzioni fisiologiche*. In quest of the sleep-giving *petite mort* he let himself be carried away by the tantalizing sounds of the woman's voice. He was on the cusp of the point of no return and had kicked off the blankets. But something was wrong. The woman's voice. It wasn't just the same woman. It was the same sounds. The same exhalations—there were no words but the voicings, the articulations, the shape of the vowels—an exact reproduction of last

²⁰⁶ From "The Intellectual," love is a tree and lovers are its shade (Rumi, p. 21).

²⁰⁷ Io says, "The reed-woven pipe drones on in a hum / and drones and drones its sleep-giving strain" (Aeschylus, Lines 576 – 577).

²⁰⁸ Connerton writes of people dreaming of extreme solitude (Connerton, p. 86).

²⁰⁹ Sartre writes about people's obsession with silence (Sartre, p. 81).

²¹⁰ Cf. a river of forgetfulness (*Inferno*, p. 87).

²¹¹ Cf. Dante looking at the stars in the night sky after his journey with Virgil (*Ibid*, p. 208).

²¹² Cf. The night sky as the psalmist saw it (Kohák, p. 31).

night's performance. And it was a performance. Some neighbour across the courtyard, who seemed to be without the benefit of earphones, or good sense regarding volume control, and yet obviously, since the window was open, in pursuit of fresh air, was enjoying some *pornografia*. Peter gloomily pulled up his shorts, got out of bed, and closed his own window with a thump.

Peter walked to the bathroom and closed the door. He opened the window, hoping for a breeze that wouldn't come. Despite, or perhaps because of, yesterday's mopping, a residue on the floor tiles remained, a strange feeling under his feet suggestive of chalkboards and fingernails. He removed his clothes, took the Epsom salts, and emptied them into the tub. He turned on the water, much hotter than his body temperature, mixing the salts, making whorls with his foot. He got in and lay back. He wallowed in the rising water, making sculling motions with his hands. Peter looked at the splash guard to his side. It appeared that his prosaic act of good-samaritanism earlier in the day had left a film. Peter thought back to a time when his mother was giving him and Olive a bath together. The image of this brightly lit tableau²¹³ caused a sudden twinge of nostalgia for them both at his not having called in such a long time.²¹⁴ Peter hadn't taken a bath in years. Cathy was always taking long soaks, splashing water on to the floor. He hadn't taken a good look at himself either. He regarded the falseness of his gym-built body, longing for some physical work to do—farming, forestry. Through the kind and fuzzy lens of memory, Peter remembered his bleak season as a tree planter.

He took a look at his submerged body and sighed. He'd been compelled to read an article about plantar fasciitis recently. And the prospect of orthotics and physiotherapy loomed. He recalled exchanges with Cathy about self-care, restless dialogues in his head.²¹⁵ "You should come with me," she said. "Get some body work done." But of course he didn't: he didn't have time, it was expensive, it wasn't useful, wasn't his thing. "It should be your thing, and you should come to yoga class with me. You're doing okay with your strength and cardio. But what about your balance and flexibility?" But his balance went only as far as not being thrown off balance by her argument. And his flexibility terminated in a witty remark about narcissistic people in stretch pants.

²¹³ Winston Smith can't remember his childhood except as a series of brightly-lit tableaux (Orwell, p. 6).

²¹⁴ Cf. Smith's guilt over his mother's death (Orwell, p. 186).

²¹⁵ Cf. A restless monologue in his head (Ibid, p. 10).

His feet at the end of the tub: he hadn't trimmed his nails before this trip. He wished to do so now, but the clippers were gone with many of the toiletries he and Cathy had been sharing. He examined his feet: the trace of oedema around his ankles, the thinning hair on the lower part of his shins—*when had that happened?* He observed his pubic hair, swaying like cilia, starting to go gray. Peter let out a snort at the sight of his unimpressive penis, the indentations around his waist from his briefs. He scanned his freckles, the cluster he knew so well on his right arm. The water soothed the swelling on the back of his leg. The salts were doing some good. *How great to be free of pain, forget my problems for a while.*²¹⁶ Peter looked at a stain on the ceiling above him. He lay still, flat on the bottom of the tub, holding his head under, lifeless as a stone.²¹⁷ This is what a foetus must feel like in a womb. His mind wandered to Linda and her lost baby. He was unforgivable now²¹⁸ a dangerous feeling coming over him.²¹⁹ Peter clenched his stomach muscles and for an instant thought of just doing it, breathing in, taking in as much water as he could. It would be enough—it wouldn't be enough. Peter sat up, arms on each side of the tub, his pink skin without, his psychic wreckage within. With no tools to manage his complex grief, his broken connections with others, Peter felt there was something alien in himself that he couldn't identify.²²⁰ More limber from the hot water, he raised his leg and examined the inflammation on the back of his knee. The line Cathy had drawn around it a day and a half ago was gone. The infected area—*was it bigger now?*—looked like the lobe of a liver. He lay still, eyes closed, breathing in through his nose, out through his mouth. After a time, the water cooled. He pushed the plug button with his heel, reluctant to move. The pipes burbled as the last few litres drained from the tub. He lay there for a few more minutes. Peter opened his eyes trying to adjust to the fluorescent light. He was just about to step out of the tub when he slipped, his legs falling out from under him, banging his knee on the edge of the tub, grabbing hold with the tips of his fingers—just in time—to the buckling splash guard. His unlovely body heaved as he struggled to catch his breath. Peter gathered a towel around himself and hurried back to his room. He lay on top of the bed enduring his tachycardia, attempting futile

²¹⁶ Cf. "Let me forget the war and cruelty inside myself," from "The War Inside" (Rumi, p. 26).

²¹⁷ Cf. "cold and lifeless stone" (Pater, p. 4).

²¹⁸ In her May 23, 2016 lecture, Professor Colby stated that in Italy, that people can externalize the guilt via sin.

²¹⁹ Scappettone states that experience equals peril (Scappettone p. 154).

²²⁰ Malpas writes of there being something in us that's alien to our conscious self-identity (Malpas, p. 67).

meditations, visualizing: the black sword of night in his eyes,²²¹ his eyes soaked with sleep, eventually succumbing to a state of wakelessness in which he dreamed he was awake, his mind in a frenzy, madness whirling him from his course.²²²

Peter woke up sweating. Midway between the repressive darkness of night and oppressive light of day in a smoke coloured morning: oblivion retreated, sleep fell away, and wakefulness came to him. Peter lay still, surprised at having slept a little. He wanted to move but forced himself to lie motionless, the brown solidity of non-light behind his lids. Still too bright. He threw his arm over his eyes, yellow shapes appearing to him. The heaviness in his bladder, in his bowel. He reached across the bed, found his phone—the alarm set to sound in five minutes—and turned it off. He rolled onto his back examining the scalloped plaster pattern in the ceiling, making new patterns in it. Peter imagined he was flying above an ocean dotted with islands, lowlands and hills—and in the depths, ridges and valleys, short curving ranges, long snaky trenches. He blinked and focused on the map in its lacquered frame. He closed his eyes slowly until two maps appeared. He opened them and there was only one, closed them again and there were two maps overlapping sitting on top of one another. This was a pastime he and Olive had indulged in, lying in bed together, Olive slowly chanting, “they’re together, they’re apart.”

“Together, apart,” said Peter, whispering his sister’s words, “together, apart,” trying to invoke some of the enchantment of those years ago. He remembered that he was alone, surprised to have gone a few moments without experiencing what he’d felt each waking moment for the past two days. He looked at the light in the curtains and tried to assess the weather, listened for traffic in the distance.

After each failed relationship, Peter always consoled himself with the thought that she, whoever she was, wasn’t his type. But now and for the first time, Peter wondered about himself. Perhaps it was him. He was attractive to no one. He was nobody’s type. He pulled the blankets over his head breathing in his exhalations. He pushed them back. The sheets were a mess. He pondered a trip to a laundromat, looked at his phone again. No messages, no missed calls. He put his feet on the floor enjoying the cool of the parquet on his soles while still lying in bed. He sat up, leaned over, elbows on his knees.

²²¹ Cf. “The black sword of night in my eyes” (Sappho, Fragment 72).

²²² Io says, “There’s a dazzling whirl in my eyes as I run / out of my course by the madness driven, / the crazy frenzy...” (Aeschylus, Lines 882 – 884).

He stood, stretched, scratched, walked to the window, closed it, sat down on the bed, fell on his side, lying there for a while before pulling his knees up to his chest. The heaviness in his bladder, a full tank.

He put on a t-shirt, walked to the bathroom, turned on the light, closed the door, avoided the mirror, pulled down his shorts, decided to sit. He thought about how he would spend the day. Peter's flight didn't leave until the next day: thirty-three hours. The heaviness in his bowel. He strained, thinking about the state of his stools since arriving and tried to recall the last time he'd gone. He strained again, shaking, feeling the pressure in his eyes, the blood in his cheeks. He sighed, wiping his hot, greasy brow. A rivulet of sweat ran down his back. Peter raised his legs thinking about peristalsis. Nothing. He stood and pulled up his shorts glancing back at the toilet bowl.

He greeted himself in the mirror: "Hello, fuck bag." The inside of his mouth tasted vile. He examined the coating on his tongue. His tongue sought a premolar on the top right where the gum was receding. Neglecting his own, Peter picked up a spent tube of Lion brand toothpaste he recalled from his days in Japan. He managed to extract a gob of gel, spilling it on the counter. He scooped at it then submitted the inside of his mouth to a violent cleaning. He rinsed and spat blood into the drain. He drew his tongue across the labial surfaces of his teeth, and fitted his upper and lower biting surfaces together.

He pulled his hair back at the temples. No longer as thick as it had once been. No individual gray hairs, but the lustre of his earlier years had given way to a hue more dun. He tried smiling. His lip cracked. Peter examined his profile on one side, then the other. He wet a facecloth running the water as hot as it would go, wrung it out, and held it to the back of his neck. He washed his armpits. He wet the cloth again and pressed it to his wound, now an abscess, on the back of his knee, blinking back tears.²²³ He hadn't one of his own, but the old single-blade razor on the counter would do. He lathered a rind of soap. He cut himself twice, but ten minutes later, his beard was gone. He pulled at the flesh of his cheeks, patted his chin.

Peter pulled the left and right sides of the three mirrored doors of the cabinet toward each other, regarding his three selves in the triptych. He pulled the sides closer together so he could see five, eight, thirteen, twenty-one, thirty-four, the white of the

²²³ Kohák writes about the importance of bearing pain (Kohák, p. 198).

fluorescent light softening to green. He slowly pulled and pushed the mirrors open and closed, swaying his head from side to side, diminishing and augmenting his numbers of selves, a kaleidoscope of Peters, of Stones.

He walked to the kitchen and put on some water for coffee. He had little desire for food but washed and cut up the fennel he'd bought the day before and enjoyed the licoricy cool of it, chewing many times, the pH of his saliva mixing agreeably with the pulp. He took his coffee with him back to his room and sat on the floor. He could just stay where he was, stay in bed, look after himself. No.

During their time together Cathy had tried to put him in the way of learning something and he'd expended considerable creative energies in contradicting her, shutting her out. Today, he resolved to let something in. This trip was a disaster and no amount of mental aerobics could alter his dissonance. But today he would try. He would be open to experience. He would at least have that. He would probably make a mess of the day too, he reasoned. But that too would be okay.²²⁴

Peter stalled for time. He paced his tiny room back and forth, one end to the other. He reviewed his contacts, spent a few minutes going through his photos. He checked his blog briefly, checked the local time and his own Pacific Standard Time, looked at the weather forecast for the next few hours, and was spinning his phone as was his irritating custom when the ring on the phone back came off his finger. The phone bounced off the brass doorstop and fell facedown on the floor. Oh! Now don't tell me you haven't been waiting for that! He picked it up and pressed the top button, the hold button, but the façade was black, jagged-cracked, splintered across the screen.²²⁵ *That stupid girl with horns*. Peter laughed out loud. He thought of his photos. No matter. It was okay, he reasoned. No, this was good. People were always telling him to put it away. He could do that now. He could finally pay attention to things. He picked up a pen and his map from the table. He sat down on the bed, running his hand through his hair. His plane ticket was on his phone. He lay down and closed his eyes, imagining difficult conversations with airport officials who didn't speak English very well. He got up, found

²²⁴ Cf. Walter Benjamin on Kafka: "Once you're certain of failure, all will work out" (Benjamin, p. 17).

²²⁵ Barrett reminds us that in *The Sound and The Fury*, Quentin Compson breaks his watch and kills time, but can't escape it (Barrett, p. 53).

his passport and put it in his pocket. He mustn't lose his passport. He pictured himself living in a crowded dormitory with other folks lacking documents. No. He had credit cards. The airline would have a record of his ticket. But the phone had not been cheap: he lamented the cost. He tried to put it out of his mind. He thought of the day before him. He was resolved to see the sights. He would do it; he would "learn something about the local scene." He would, ahem, leave no stone unturned. And so it was in this firm but somewhat less than sanguine frame of mind that our hero Peter Stone departed for his final day in old La Rossa.

Peter lolled about on the steps of the San Petronio Basilica for a few minutes, nodding to the tourists passing by. Later, fatigued and guided by little more than his collective losses, Peter limped through the streets: via dell' Indepenza, via Agosto Righi, via delle Miline, largo Respighi, via Zamboni, Strada Maggiore. Peter was in pain. His liver wasn't ravaged by an eagle, but as he trudged, taking cover from the rain, under the protection of Bologna's kilometres of porticoes, a poison was working through him as toxic as Jupiter's saliva.²²⁶ Peter considered the hard tiles beneath his feet, the smoothness, the intricate design, the patterns that had no pattern.

Pedestrians passed by in conversation with their companions or alone in thought. Peter looked ahead and to his side at the arches, the complexly curved architecture of the ceilings, the columns. Cathy had always seemed to be talking about columns: Ionian—others with names he of course couldn't recall.

The rain let up and Peter wandered away from the covered walkways. He thought about the language school, another bridge burned. To his left was an alley between buildings: no—a canal. *Wasn't Venice supposed to be the city of canals?* He looked up at the clouds. He walked by a store window, the display featuring heart-sized loaves of mortadella. Peter laughed wryly to himself, *the bologna of Bologna*. The spreading infection and weeping lesion in his leg vexed him. If he could just keep walking. Peter had few ideas about mantra or prayer, but he whispered to himself in encouragement: "keep going, keep going," in time with his stride and the opening and closing of his heart.

²²⁶ In his discussion of Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*, Richard Holmes writes of the eagle with its beak dipped in Jupiter's poisonous saliva (Holmes, p. 260).

He kept his pace. He'd be okay. He was really travelling now. Travel hurts. But this hurt would free him.²²⁷ This was good, walking was good. At home he drove everywhere. He'd never thought about walking before, regarding pedestrians as a kind of sauntering pestilence. But now walking cleared his mind. He didn't have to think about anything. He could focus on the street ahead, no more troubling thoughts. He walked. It wasn't much, but he could walk. To walk is to create, he thought, and stepped under the porticoes again.²²⁸ Peter felt he could have kept walking forever, time stretching out before him, eternity an endless repetition of presents,²²⁹ amid these broad sheltered sidewalks. Others passing him by were strolling, loitering.²³⁰ But Peter was no flâneur. He kept up his haste. When he got home, he would walk, he would go for more walks. He loved these porticoes. This place was sacred geography.²³¹ He thought about the long markerless blocks of his early life neighbourhood.²³² Most people here knew where they were from, Peter thought. He considered the vague ideas he had about his own past: his grandparents coming to Canada from Great Britain after the war. He thought of the place he'd grown up. He understood almost nothing about it.²³³ He was unsure of it. What was he sure of? His injured leg—it was no problem now.²³⁴ It was a permanent part of himself, not just something he lived with but something he did.²³⁵ He was his injury. The ideas kept coming to him.²³⁶ He was his walk,²³⁷ walking back to grace.²³⁸ It was a march—this city, the people, the customs, the monuments—it was the march of a

²²⁷ Montaigne writes about the need to lighten oneself of personal burdens before being able to benefit from travel (Montaigne, p. 5).

²²⁸ To walk is to create (Davis, p. 150).

²²⁹ Eternity an endless repetition of presents (Camus, p. xix).

²³⁰ Writing of Paris, Benjamin asserts that the walkable city invites loitering, strolling, thinking (Benjamin, p. 21).

²³¹ Sacred geography (Davis, p. 124).

²³² Connerton writes about the disappearance of walkable cities (Connerton, p. 5).

²³³ In her essay "Slouching Toward Bethlehem," Didion writes about the lost youth of the 1960s, especially in San Francisco, stating that no one knew where they were from (Didion, p. 86).

²³⁴ Camus stresses the importance not of being cured but of living with one's ailments (Camus, p. 41).

²³⁵ Patients see themselves as agents: their illness is something they do (Kohák, p. 153).

²³⁶ Ron Rindo's essay, "Gyromancy" addresses the importance of vulnerability and suffering to creativity (Rindo, p. 162).

²³⁷ With pilgrimage, people are reified by spaced action (Connerton, p. 17).

²³⁸ Quoting Seneca, Kohák asserts that we're fallen and we must pilgrimage our way back to grace (Kohák, p. 10).

lifetime. When he returned home, he'd have to discover a new life—relationships, or a new life alone, perhaps a new job in a new city, a renewed existence, an opportunity to survive.²³⁹

Peter was sweating: his clothes were wet. He thought of Cathy and her worry in Italy about her belongings while out of doors.²⁴⁰ Patting his pockets for his wallet and keys, Peter found the idea suddenly ridiculous. He regarded the passers-by and felt a kinship with them. They were walking; he was walking; they were all walking together—across time, across space, across social position.²⁴¹ Peter looked at them. They avoided his glance. His leg. So long as he kept moving he'd be okay. Circulation: proper circulation, he thought. He marched around the Piazza Maggiore again. He'd made a lot of mistakes in his life, but walking would solve them. It wouldn't solve everything, but it was a start.²⁴²

He resolved once again to make walking a daily part of his life when he got home. It wouldn't cure him, but it would help him live with his troubles. Presently, however, his steps became slower, shorter. His mouth felt sticky. The sun was coming out. Peter now squinted and stopped frequently to close his eyes. He could no longer open them completely without some discomfort, his sunglasses left back in his room on account of the morning's overcast sky. That was okay. He could take it. He wanted it to hurt. It would define him. This walking, he resolved now, was futile, after all, and at this Peter felt unexpectedly something akin to joy, a dignity in this futility.²⁴³

His hands felt stiff. Peter stopped and tested the capillary refill of his nail beds. Peter approached the Fountain of Neptune as if to take a drink. But perhaps the water god was away visiting with his followers further inland. The fountain wasn't working: some kind of construction, a tarpaulin covering one side of it. It was empty. He wished it were full. He wished he could dunk his head under the water, drink deeply from it,

²³⁹ The pilgrimage of a lifetime [involves] coming into contact with people, cities, customs, monuments, and sanctuaries that have never been met or seen before, for people seeking a new life, a new job, and an opportunity to survive (Campanini, p. 14).

²⁴⁰ Cf. Dante's notion that the Bolognese are covetous (*Inferno*, p. 109).

²⁴¹ Connerton states that pilgrimage occurs across space but also time and social position (Connerton, p. 14).

²⁴² A pilgrim's journey will change him, yet the change within him won't be enough to ensure his success. He needs prayer to sustain him (Campanini, p. 13).

²⁴³ Cf. "pride in futility" (Camus, p. 103).

immerse himself in it, take a bath in it, flaunt his foreignness and flout social convention. Peter regarded the weird and voluptuous statuary. He thought of the guy from the fight scene in that Shakespeare film from his high school English class, pretending to do his laundry in the fountain. That guy was funny. That guy was sad.²⁴⁴

At the entrance to a plain building, Peter saw a young woman, not a person whom a stranger usually dare approach,²⁴⁵ prone on the sidewalk, forehead and elbows on the ground, palms upward. At last, thought Peter, here's someone I can relate to. He wished he could speak to her. *Where am I headed, and where will I end?*²⁴⁶ Her head was shorn down to stubble. She raised her head, her eyes sad, resigned, yet bright with vitality. She sat on her knees regarding him with gentle sympathy, Peter startled by this glance of compassion.²⁴⁷ He'd seen her before, someone like her, the punk methadone girl from his store with a beauty no ragged clothes, no privation, could hide. He yearned to talk with her and imagined her speaking with him, speaking to his own sadness—*speak: it is good to tell a tale of grief about your sufferings when you're likely to earn a gift of tears from your listeners.*²⁴⁸ He wondered how she'd got here, and wished to communicate, encouraged by the thought that she wouldn't understand him. He started: "I can't control my speech, my words washed away by the ..." ²⁴⁹ then faltered, shaking his head at the pointlessness of it.

Peter took out his wallet, looked at the bills, and put a note into her hand. She took it and knelt down in her former supplicant's position. He was suddenly overcome with the urge to give her all he had with him. He had about 300 Euros. No. He would go to a bank machine, withdraw all his money, max out his credit cards, give it all to her, enough to live on for a long time. Peter thought about this blindly, hopefully.²⁵⁰ He would look after her. He could stay there, get some kind of visitor's visa: they would live

²⁴⁴ This refers to Mercutio from Fellini's 1968 film of *Romeo and Juliet*.

²⁴⁵ In relating the story of Io's suffering to the Chorus, Prometheus talks about the Chalybes [not] "people whom a stranger dare approach" (Aeschylus, Line 715).

²⁴⁶ Io says, "... tell me what remains for me, / tell me ..." (Ibid, Lines 686 – 687).

²⁴⁷ Cf. La Donna Gentile in *La Vita Nuova* (*La Vita Nuova*, p. 89).

²⁴⁸ Prometheus says, "To ... make wail for your ill fortune, / when you will win a tear from those who listen, / is well worthwhile" (Aeschylus, Lines 637 – 639).

²⁴⁹ Io says, "my tongue ungoverned / babbles, the words in a muddy flow strike / on the waves of the mischief I hate, strike wild / without aim or sense." (Ibid, Lines 884 – 887).

²⁵⁰ Prometheus in speaking of his work for the vulnerable race of humans, "I sowed in them blind hopes" (Ibid, Line 252).

together. Peter suddenly felt foolish, choking—a sharp tug on his psychic collar. He should be thinking of Cathy.²⁵¹ What was she doing now? Did she think of him? He thought of Linda. Was she okay? Maybe he couldn't love anyone. He loved, but not any of the women he'd been with. It was something else.²⁵² Peter looked again at the supplicant before him, and thought of the people he'd seen this past week with their placards. Maybe it was the translation. *Ho fame* felt more personal here than such words he'd seen back at home. This woman didn't have a placard. Peter felt ashamed and looked away.

He stepped back to look at the unremarkable building before him. It looked like a warehouse. It was a church. An inscription beside the door read Santa Maria della Vita: the Church of Life.²⁵³ He thought of his mother and her persistent volunteer work. He didn't want to think of her now. He wanted peace.²⁵⁴ He was no longer sweating. He felt his forehead: dry, hot, and suddenly longed for some quiet place to rest. Did I say this already? I forget. I too am weary, as perhaps we all are.²⁵⁵

He entered the building, cool and dark. He stood for a moment, trying to take in what he saw. The inside was a great lacuna, and not plain like the outside but a riot of colours, still, with great movement: the reds, the blues—densely chromatic, the clusters of ornate design²⁵⁶ atop the columns: the granularity of detail in the paintings and architecture.²⁵⁷ He dropped some coins in the box for the attendant. Peter walked past a small group of visitors to view some of the paintings. He read the English translations of the notes, his eyes racing over the words—... characters of classical mythology ... foretellers of things to come ... Cumae... founders of Rome ... Phrygia ... the Redeemer

²⁵¹ Dante has feelings for La Donna Gentile and feels guilty about this betrayal of Beatrice (*La Vita Nuova*, p. 93).

²⁵² Malpas states that we can't fulfill our desire because we love not the other but something else (Malpas, p. 68).

²⁵³ Raniero Barcobini Fasani started a hospital in Bologna. It became the Church of Life (Campanini, p. 6).

²⁵⁴ Raniero Barcobini Fasani journeyed to Bologna in 1260. He started with few followers but more followed him. As they traveled, they cried out for peace. (Campanini, p. 5).

²⁵⁵ Kafka, in his short work, "Prometheus" "... the gods forgot... the gods grew weary..." (Kafka, p. 103).

²⁵⁶ The idea that the churches are plain on the outside, with a riot of colour and movement inside was introduced by Professor Colby during her April 1, 2016 lecture.

²⁵⁷ Scappettone refers to granularity of detail in *Killing the Moonlight* (Scappettone p. 111).

... Persia ... life of Alexander... Peter left these and moved on as if gliding to the first chapel: *St. Joseph and the Christ Child*. Joseph, Peter remembered, the earthly father of Christ, preventer of Mary's shame, receiver of the Magi, who raised Jesus as his own. To the left of the Presbytery, Peter saw *Saint Ursula before the Tyrant*: Ursula, the leader of slain holy virgins.²⁵⁸ And to the right, life-sized terra cotta figures:²⁵⁹ the Madonna, three Marys, John the Apostle, and Joseph of Arimathea, all mourning over Christ's dead body—instantaneous motion,²⁶⁰ the anguish on the women's faces and expressions rendered by their hands—a love divine.²⁶¹ Niccolò del' Arca's *Compianto sul Cristo Morto*.

Peter felt his limbs go slack.²⁶² Cathy had told her half-listening boyfriend a lot about art in their short time together, but Peter couldn't recall her ever talking about this. It was not prestigious like the *Pieta* or the Davids,²⁶³ but it affected him. And there was little in his church-going and church-avoiding life that could have prepared him for it.²⁶⁴ The figures looked familiar to Peter and he considered them one by one.

Joseph of Arimathea:²⁶⁵ kneeling with his tools. In him, Peter saw his father, not as he'd regarded him, but as his father really was—distant but calm, competent, reserved, thoughtful.

²⁵⁸ This scene is described in detail in the text on the *Compianto*: Classical mythological characters like the sibyls of pre-Christian lore: The first chapel: *St. Joseph with Christ Child*, the second chapel: *Saint Jerome*, the third chapel: *Saint Anne and the Child Mary*. Two bays flanking the Presbytery on the left Saint Ursula before the Tyrant; on the right: *The Compianto sul Cristo morto* (Campanini, p. 8).

²⁵⁹ Life-size terra cotta figures: the Madonna, the three Marys, John the Apostle, and Joseph of Arimathea mourning over Christ's dead body (Ibid, p. 9).

²⁶⁰ Pater refers to the reproduction in art of instantaneous motion (Pater, p. 99).

²⁶¹ In his May 11, 2016 lecture on Niccolò del' Arca's *Compianto sul Cristo Morto*, Alessandro Guidi talked about the anguish on the women's faces, and the expressions rendered by their hands and fingers.

²⁶² Cf. Eros once more limbslackener" (Sappho, Fragment 71).

²⁶³ In his May 11, 2016 lecture on the *Compianto*, Alessandro Guidi stated that it's not prestigious like the Davids.

²⁶⁴ Barrett states that Protestants have heightened religious consciousness but are disconnected from their unconscious (Barrett, p. 28).

²⁶⁵ Joseph of Arimathea: kneeling, pincers hanging from his belt and a hammer in his hand (Campanini, p. 11).

Mary Salome. Salome, not the dancer—a different Salome: Peter didn't know her. Holding back her tears—her nose wrinkled with the effort,²⁶⁶ clutching at her knees: in this figure Peter saw his six year old sister Olive, helpless, sitting on her bed the evening their father had left. Just two years older and too young to help her at the time, Peter considered now the effort he'd made to forget all of that. He'd stayed out of her life, a neglectful brother, but maybe it wasn't too late to make up for this, to do something good for her.²⁶⁷

The Virgin in her stone scream:²⁶⁸ not the weary young woman with infant, but the mature widowed mother grieving at her son's death. Peter thought of his own mother and her ageing body.²⁶⁹ He thought about the depthless hostility he'd expressed to her, the creases of her forehead deepened by his relentless choler. In this figure, Peter saw the patient suffering, the adduction of her head, her hands—his own mother's folded hands, her entwined fingers, the lines of the knuckles, the infinite in the small.²⁷⁰

Saint John the Evangelist: speechless, overcome with sorrow:²⁷¹ the rotation of his head cradled in his palm. The resemblance was uncanny and unmistakable. This figure was John, the tolerant friend of Peter's former life. And Peter was, perhaps for the first time, grateful for the countless words of good faith and good will his old friend had communicated to him.

He read the next caption: Mary of Clopas: like Salome, Peter didn't know this character either, but looking at her he felt heartsick. Resistant, recoiling in futile effort to conceal the sight of Christ's maimed body—in this figure, Peter saw Linda, his Linda, the nervous agony of this statue showing him her agitation he recalled from her cheerless

²⁶⁶ Mary Salome tries to hold back her tears, clutching her own legs and the cloth of her robe (Campanini, p. 11).

²⁶⁷ In her May 16, 2016 lecture, Professor Colby mentioned that Tennessee Williams had gone to Florence and suffered a nervous breakdown before returning to the USA to do something good, to write *The Glass Menagerie*.

²⁶⁸ The Virgin: in a stone scream, tormented by her grief, hands clasped tightly together (Campanini, p. 10).

²⁶⁹ Williamson writes that flight from the motherland is a fantastic remaking of the mother's damaged body (Williamson, p. 23).

²⁷⁰ Barrett writes about looking for the infinite in the small: in Cleopatra's nose, for example, (Barrett, p. 117).

²⁷¹ Saint John the evangelist: speechless, overcome with deep sorrow (Campanini, p. 11).

time of woe.²⁷² He breathed deeply considering the extension and dorsiflexion of her hands.

Then, and finally, Mary Magdalene: dishevelled and lonely, breathless, the anterior supination of her hands: this was Cathy, in a tormented dance around Christ's body, her robe outstretched with movement.²⁷³ The sadness of these women, their grief and expression of an intense and immense love violently curtailed: Peter looked on adding up the losses of those who'd loved him and might have continued to do so, even to this day, despite his scoundrelcy, in their affection for him.²⁷⁴ He felt his own absence keenly from this tableau, no role for him here.²⁷⁵

Ignorant of the history of the della Vita, Peter Stone could not have known that this church was originally associated with a hospital, and as property was now operating under the auspices of the local health authority.²⁷⁶ The *Compianto* was not some mere abstraction depicting some ancient and unknowable people. In fact, del' Arca had modeled the suffering of the statue's figures on the real-life suffering of the relatives of patients, who were often in pain and sometimes died.²⁷⁷ At this, our hero might have taken some consolation. But he couldn't. As he looked beseechingly at the rendering of these witnesses, he stifled a cry. He wanted to scream out to them in anguished tension,²⁷⁸ finally tragic during his hour of consciousness,²⁷⁹ not merely intelligent but finally conscious, finally surrendering to the true terror and dignity of becoming himself.²⁸⁰

²⁷² Mary of Clopas: stops abruptly, hands up to conceal the sight of his dead body and resist what has happened (Campanini, p. 10).

²⁷³ Mary Magdalene is disheveled and windswept, breathless, disbelief at the inexorable reality of Christ's death in a "wild dance" around Christ's body (Ibid, p. 10).

²⁷⁴ In *Heat*, Buford mentions "artisans whose subject is loss (Buford, p. 281).

²⁷⁵ In her May 22, 2016 lecture, Professor Colby talked about Henry James's notion about people experiencing the pain of something that never was.

²⁷⁶ *The Compianto* is an object of religious worship linked to the history of the care of the sick and convalescent (Campanini, p. 15).

²⁷⁷ Del' Arca modeled his work on the torment, tears and suffering visible in the faces and bodies of the relatives of the people in the hospital next door (Ibid, p. 12).

²⁷⁸ Cf. "What I see is rage and vital tension" (Samaritani, p. 21).

²⁷⁹ Cf. Tragic only during his hour of consciousness (Camus, p. 109).

²⁸⁰ Cf. We must suffer the terror and dignity of becoming a self (Barrett, p. 220).

Then, without warning, soundlessly, shoulders heaving, he wept. Tears ran down his cheeks, off his chin, and on to the ground: plop, plop—his tears wearing the floor.²⁸¹ He brushed them away with his hands and cried without shame. Groaning with sufferings,²⁸² his cries rang through the church: they would have pierced the heart of a stone.²⁸³

Peter was oblivious to the presence of two custodians of the church speaking to him. Eager to feel the warm smoothness of these carvings in his hands, he was aware of a keen desire to step across the fence barrier into the enclosure to touch, to embrace these figures. Here was no whittling away, subtracting to find in a chunk of cold marble some undiscoverable core. Here, all of Peter's deficiency, want, dearth, privation of emotion and physical expression melted away in the *Compianto's* additive terra cotta nature.²⁸⁴ And Peter felt in these figures not lack—here was no absence, indeed—but an abundance, plenty, wealth, lavishness such as he'd never before encountered. And looking at the *Compianto*, now laughing now crying, Peter felt for once a pleasurable absence of self.²⁸⁵ He surrendered to trust, merged with the figures, and entered into a vast, manic, silent, oceanic space.²⁸⁶

²⁸¹ Cf. "The Willow Song" of Desdemona: "...Her salt tears fell from her and soften'd the / stones..." (Shakespeare, Lines 44 – 45).

²⁸² Cf. Hephaestus speaking to the mute Prometheus as he nails him to the rock, "I groan for your suffering" (Aeschylus, Line 66).

²⁸³ Cf. "The lamentations of the widow would have pierced the heart of a stone. (Charles Dickens, from *David Copperfield*, as reported in the OED).

²⁸⁴ During the May 19, 2016 class, student Nadia Thibault stated that terra cotta is an additive, not subtractive, form of sculpture.

²⁸⁵ Williamson writes of the pleasurable absence of self in merging with the object and the degree of trust associated with that object (Williamson, p. 36).

²⁸⁶ Williamson states that [a] great work of art is surrounded by silence. And a manic oceanic space is entered into (Ibid, p. 37).

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