

THE GHOST MACHINE



DAVID BIRCUMSHAW

THE GHOST MACHINE
OR THE JEST OF THEOLOGY
being the ruminations of the rueful
or the mammal's perplexity
the fragments of a hole
and the mirror of the sole
THE GHOST MACHINE
or a step beyond the steeple

THE GHOST MACHINE
GHOST MACHINE

THE GHOST MACHINE

THE

READ
READ

READ

'the senseless poem of a senseless student'
Perhaps. Discuss with yourself. Debate with the air.
Find out what happens where everything ends. Enter

THE GHOST MACHINE

we promise it will haunt you - ha ha!

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david bircumshaw
1994-1997

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GHOST MACHINE DNA - A SAMPLE PAGE

whatever
happens
within
these
pages
let
your
thoughts
remain
alone
your
own
and
never
twined
across
another's
mind

The Ghost Machine The Original Version

**as established by the foremost scholar of its birth
available now for the first time and superseding all
previous productions.**

**published by Lackland and Mackintosh
London, Calcutta and Novosibirsk
2094**

THE GHOST MACHINE

An Editor's Prologue

It was with considerable pleasure, albeit not unalloyed with trepidation, that I accepted, on a balmy summer evening on the shore of Lake Trettino, in the blue and silver fading of the late light, the invitation of Gotham University to prepare for the world this new edition of *The Ghost Machine*. As is well-known, the integrity of the text of the first, unexpanded edition is, as it were, a hot bed of dispute, the essence of the problem lying, as it were, in the author's strange idea of (simultaneously) publishing three different versions via three different printers, not to mention the (undated) freeware edition on floppy disk, compounded with his extreme myopia, which resulted in an unwanted, unwonted and unwarranted wealth of textual variants.

In addition, the circulation of differing typescripts among the author's friends and acquaintances, and among casual strangers who were forced, coaxed or paid to read his work, resulting in both a thicket of pirate editions and the memorial volume compiled by his friends after his unfortunate demise in Tesco's, multiplied like the sons of confusion the veritable babel of *Ghost Machines*.

It is a commonplace of academia that the later (5th to 11th) editions are free of most of these problems, largely owing, it must be confessed, to the expanded version being composed in the main by other hands (and proof-read by better eyes) than those of our somewhat eccentric author. The identity of these persons, of course, is the rich trove of many scholars, but to return to my theme, the establishment of a core, ur-text is the primary need of students of the, as it were, palaeo- *Ghost Machine*. Just as a knowledge of the primitive, pre-mammalian basis of the brain is essential to an understanding of the higher cortex, so is a fixing of the rudimentary form of what was to become a cathedral of literature necessary to the inner cohesion of *The Ghost Machine*. It is perhaps not inapt to compare the ur-text to an ancient reptile, known only by fragmentary fossils, variably and controversially reconstructed, and separated by the vast sweep of evolution from the glory of civilization created on the advent of humankind, the glory that was to become the fifth and later editions of *The Ghost Machine*.

It is, however, to the first author's credit that he initiated the great work. It is not my purpose here, I must aver, to engage with those who dispute his authorship of even the first edition(s), fascinating as their theories are, such as the suggestion of Professor Hoppenstock, that it is a *found* text (from a bin at a Leicester bus-station, to be precise); or that the work was composed by a sectioned inmate of a psychiatric hospital on a course of literary therapy, and was shown to the reputed author by his own therapist as an example of the disconnected logic of an ailing mind (vide Nutt, Boom and Case, *The Ghost Machine Conspiracy*); or, wildest and most exciting of all, the speculations of The *Ghost Machine* Institute of Reykjavik University, that the true authorship lies with the celebrated baboon-troop of the Coalville Cavendish Laboratory, where the author was employed as a security guard for some three months, precisely the period for which records were lost owing to the dementia of Professor Happenstance. To re-iterate my aim, the

object of the four years of research that made this volume possible was to establish a definitive, basic text.

As the vagaries of the work's birth made this impossible in any normal sense, see, for example, Gumley and Goode, *'The Inheritance Of The Ghost Machine: A Study Of The Incompatible'*, I decided on a new and radical approach. It is by this that this edition will stand or fall.

Initially the project employed a purpose-built computer, EDICOM, but unfortunately the machine, attempting to unravel obscurities of symbol and misprint, became locked in a logic loop, from which it has not returned these last two years. There are those who believe that EDICOM has found something akin to ancient nirvana, and that meditation on and recital of the textual variants will enable others to follow, however such views I must deem to belong to the history of cultism, rather than literary studies.

The failure of EDICOM, as I believe it, yet led to the breakthrough that created this edition. I hypothesised that, as random variation was the essence of the textual problem, the only possible resolution would be by chance. Accordingly, aided by some bronze Chinese coins, and a certain antique oracle, I selected, line by line, a definitive text, founded upon that very chance attendant upon the genesis of the work. As a control experiment, a second random text was created, with the assistance of a scrolling screen and a mouse, readings being chosen as the mouse squeaked, the punning association of mouse and computer being, I felt, true to the spirit of both work and author.

To my delight, the texts co-incided exactly. (See Widemgeiner and Wade, *'Hyberbolic Functions Of The Impredictable'*, and Gainsay and Guile, *'An Intoduction To Improbability Theory'*.)

It is with pride, tempered by humility, that I present to the public this new and, in the truest sense, original edition of *'The Ghost Machine'*.

Professor Dennis Kirwen Channing-Chow
The Univesity of Gotham-in-Tipton
January, 2094.

THE GHOST MACHINE

OR A FIT IN FOUR BITS

BEING A PLAY SHORT OF AN ACT

OR A TRANSMIGRATION OF THE SOLE

Eheu fugaces, Postume, Postume

a man of no name with no fortune to come

CARGO:

1, Opening the device: O'ER THE TOP

2, Priming the device: THE ROCK GARDEN

3, Testing the device: BONE

4, Failing the device: THE DOME

With sundry appendices and panegyrics but lately found

Being indited by mine hand,

DAVID BIRCUMSHAW

OCTOBER 31st — NOVEMBER 18th 1994

Dia.

My lord,

What tricke or phantasme of the nether ayre
Doth mock and goade thee on a hollow speech?
My lord -

Prince

Peace. Darké-nesse. Yet in that darkling
Light allumes mee like the sov'ran sunne.
On all points hemm'd? By the fring'd surrounds
Of this so curtain'd world curtailéd bound?
Goddess will, for I will not! On, I goe, on!
On certe-lesse ends my certain sworde I fend!

(he rushes to the parapet, sword drawn, and falls from the tower)

Prince

The rest is si -

Dia.

With thee my prince I die.

(leaps after him)

Curzon runs at the ghost and vanishes from the chronicle and sight. Flaminus is seized by The Others and as a traitor bound. A fearful voice is heard within the mist.

Voice

Why what but why what mine but my what why?

The Others move centre stage, dragging Flaminus on a lead like a dog.

The Others

Cut is the budding of that royal tree;

Grief's forward tides must fell paternity.

By brumous limn and hue the state's unmended,

With noble blood our play's now common-ended.

Exeunt all. Alarums. Banners. Selling of Pies.

THE ROCK GARDEN

Personae Eneon; Nogniht; The Voice Of The Dome.

Scene a frozen landscape of tundra under a grey sky. To the left obtrudes the plastic skin of an opaque dome, its grey matching the sky.
Enter Eneon, a lead hanging from his collared neck.

En.
(distractedly) Still life. Life still. A wound, a darkened room.
A bowl of cherries and grapes. A red story
with a green tinge. Nonsense. A table,
a heavy fist thumps down on't : *thou dost*.
What was that, dust? Nonsense, talk table,
a meal share, grace. That *mars not marries with*
What? { **pauses**)

He bends down to a low barrow-like mound, banked with grey sterile fragments of rock. A minute summit flesh-pink, projects from its far end. Eneon cautiously extends an arm towards it, sniffs the air with circumspection. He tweaks the little peak, then squeezes it like a horn.

Nog. (pained) Me nosth, thno, thath hurth, thstopith, thstopth.

En.(to audience) Obviously a connoisseur of the fricative.

(to Nog) Dental, North-West European? Haughty Iberian? Or the glory that was Hellas, alas?

Ach, my damn'd head. Thou dost affect. My head.

Nog. You hurt my nose. Hurt me. You were my friend.

En.

(feigns interest) Was I really? **(now pompously)** Of what nation are you, what affiliation and name?

Nog. Nogniht is my name, my birthplace, pain.

En. How int-eresting!

Nog. You were called -

Voice Of The Dome.

PEACE.

The Voice rebounds like thunder from the dome, which acquires a pinkish hue.

Nog.(desperate) And I was -

Voice (louder) **PEACE.**

En. My head. Thou dust.

Nog.(plaintive) We were friends once.

En. (dementedly) Haven't had such fun in years.

Not since Margate. Or was it Heidelberg?

And the prince, he'd say:

Both Very like a bawdy house.

En. A short board for a soul.

Nog. I have longer lodging now.
En. Surer than the thrones of kings. Thou dost
no malfeasance toll nor starv'd affliction
whip and goad. The very cherubim that -

Voice. (louder still) **PEACE.**

Eneon grips his head in agony.

En. A heavy fist thumps on' t. O my good lord,
ha, non-sense, he never our table shared.
Nog. He never came.

En. Never will.

Nog. Never cared.

**They fall silent for a long time. Eneon looks out at the audience,
then at Nognight**

En. I need to end this now.

Nog. Eneon, I'm scared.

En. I'll stay here for you, Nag.

Nog. En, I'm still scared.

En. The prince's sword, the hireling's borrow'd pride,
shall hurt not Nog, who takes the air for bride.

Nog. You swear?

En.(taps his head)
By this empty bowl that holds life still.

**Eneon shuffles purposively towards Nogniht, then halts, puzzles with a dog-
like curiosity at the dome. His nose wrinkles.**

En.(boyish) Nog, that half-globe dome thing, wassit for?

Nog.(flatly) We're not allowed to say.

En. Aren't we? H'm, so.

**Eneon moves on to the stone-mound and begins to dismember it,
delicately, one rock at a time. Sobs are heard from it throughout,
ever more faintly. He places each stone apart in an invisible
square. Eventually, there is but one stone left. The sobbing ceases.
And nothing more bar a nose. He picks it up. It is made of a
malleable plastic like rubber. He pockets it with a sniff. Then
changes his mind and throws it away. He squats down, staring
into the stones and silence. The dome glows, pink with
satisfaction.**

Curtain. Lights. Quiet shuffling in the aisles.

VERY IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT

THERE WILL NOW BE A SHORT PAUSE FOR THE BURIAL

*

OF THE PLOT

INTERMISSION

*

(If, that is, a plot can be found —Ed.)

G. M. NEWS

ON THE DECADE ON THE BALL

UNJUSTIFIED SEIZURE by outraged Others

Flaminus Flaminus reported missing post-fiction

Dark hints of *Transmigration*

soul – ar return suspected between episodes

The Prince, The Ghost, The Mist and Me

an exclusive interview with the late

Diadema

CONTRA-FLOW CONGESTION BETWEEN DIMENSIONS

metaphysical daytrippers

block the Crossing

AUTHORWATCH AUTHORWATCH AUTHORWATCH

The Himalayan Trek - In the footsteps of lost intent

New prose style opens Paris season

TRANSCENDENTAL LEANINGS

a market analysis

STOP PRESS - Rubber noses are go

BONE

a monologue for two

Personae: The Man

Bone, the man's creature

Scene : An ill-furnished room. It contains a table, a desk, a single

bed

on which the man rests, a bare lightbulb, a fireplace, a tap with no sink, a bowl, a mug, some cereals and odds and ends.

It has no fittings, no window and a single door. The light is on. In the middle of the room squats Bone. He wears an over-tight dark green suit. He has no mouth, eyes, nose nor hair - only ears.

The man begins to speak-

- Bone, are you listening. Good. Your tasks today are as follows: first, take the table and break it against the wall, then kindle a fire for me from its material. That's wood, Bone. Next, taking my bowl, spoon, and a portion of oats (the grains Bone, the small rough grains) and with a sufficient quantity of water (obtained from the tap on the far wall, Bone.) proceed to effect the cooking of my daily repast by heating the water and oats over the fire. Be careful when handling my bowl, Bone, *it is fireproof you are not.* Understand? Good. After these duties have been completed to my satisfaction I shall instruct you further. I will tell you more, Bone.

Bone feels his way about the room and, not without difficulties, executes his assignments. He serves the man the gruel.

- Excellent. You may rest while I ingest, Bone.

Bone squats in the middle, ears at the ready.

- Good. I can almost confess that you are improving in your application of the culinary arts, Bone, although my reason reminds me it is by virtue of my possession of the higher powers of imagination, a faculty I cannot imagine yours, than by your manual activities that this apparent improvement in my food is made manifest. *Imagination, Bone, imagine.* There is some porridge on my upper lip, Bone, remove it at once.

Bone obeys.

- Good. Now bring the book from my - no, no, not yet. First, Bone, tidy the wood remaining from the table and clean my bowl and spoon. Good, that's a better plan, a better order. I have often thought, Bone, of how you would survive . without my assistance. For I am a kindly man, Bone. I recall well how I rescued you that day,

BONE

when I used to walk, the last time I walked, when you were blindly standing by the kerb, pitifully incapable of crossing. We cannot all cross that road, Bone. I, of course, have no need to now. But you, Bone? No, not you. Get along with your tasks, Bone, my labours are excessive and I may again need to renew myself with comestibles. I am **forced** to support my energies. Consider, for example, my most recent studies: I have established, by *prolonged* observations, methodically and repetitiously executed, that, as a result of the Laws of Thermodynamics, in order to follow my studies to conclusion, and thus benefit all humankind, I must abstain from any form of physical labour or exertion, other than that necessary to the maintenance of biological functions. Therefore, by dint of the conservation of energy, I shall retain sufficient expectation of life for my needs. For my *work's* needs. I cannot expect you to understand the details of my present or future investigations, but be assured, Bone, there are those more fitting who will. Yet you too, Bone, play your part in the scheme of things.

Bone has completed his tasks.

- Good. *Now* bring the book from my desk. Good. Now turn it towards me and open it on the ribboned page. H'm, exactly as my theory forecast: it's Friday today. H'm, Friday. We know what happens on Fridays, don't we, Bone. In that at least we share a common knowledge. Now turn the page forward, Bone, and place the ribbon on it. Good. Close the book and replace it on my desk. When you have done so, go to the door and listen. Alert me at the first sign. The very first. We must prevent the repetition of Fridays. Yes, other Fridays. I have written letters. I have campaigned, cajoled, exhorted. But those in authority are deaf to my science, my genius. Who is ever before his time. They will not listen, Bone, nor can they see. They will only say: *The suggestion seems unwarranted.* I shall be forgiving, Bone, when my insight is understood and that name of Friday is expunged from the week. For I have proved the need, I have made infallible equations. Have you heard anything yet?

Bone shakes his head.

BONE

- Good. I will not allow it again, Bone, not if he -. Enough. I am in danger of fatigue. But understand, Bone, I do not wish to see that man again. If he does come, you are to take the desk and barricade the door. Immediately. He shall **not** be allowed in my presence. When he touches my cranium. When he feels about my thoughts. When he alters things, I know he does: dates, materials, appurtenances, scenes. I shall countenance him no more. Stay by the door. I have need of rest now, Bone, I shall sleep for a while. Remember, if he comes, the door

Bone stands motionless listening at the door. The man falls asleep, stirs, writhes, then subsides. He wakes, abrupt and abruptly.

- Bone, what are you doing by the door? Go to my desk and bring my book. Now open it on the ribboned page. I thought so Thursday. Who told you to go to the door? Have you been sleeping, Bone, have you been having dreams? I shall consider your punishment and inform you awhile. Put down the book. Not there, on the desk. Automaton. And close it. With the ribbon on the next page. Machine. You are my servant, Bone, and should be my servant's servant. So consider your good fortune, your elevation. Could your parents have appointed you thus? Yet with all this, you abuse my generosity, my trust, Bone, and sleep at my expense. You know you are forbidden dreams. I am weary, Bone, your burden grows hard upon me. I am thirsty, see to my needs.

Bone executes the command - without any further instructions.

-Good. I have conditioned you well, have I not? I shall confide in you, Bone: of late I have allowed much of my philosophical speculation to a matter of considerable interest, yet a matter that concerns you. Yes, you. That is, *how do you* provide yourself with sustenance? For not only do you lack means of support, but you have no physical apparatus for the intake of nourishment. To my surprise, I have been forced to conclude that you, Bone, you, are constituted in such a manner as to contain within you a *secret*, an epochal, life-transforming secret - the permanent, replication of form. Undying energy. I have considered anatomical investigation. I have thought of walking again, to go *out there*, in order to find another, and making a controlled, comparative study. Be honoured, Bone, I shall be devoting more of my attention to this matter. Truly, I almost wish you could talk.

BONE

Bone stands erect and takes a red stick from a pocket. On his faceless face. he draws a pair of perfect smiling lips. Deliberately he advances on the man, who stares, astonished.

- Stop, you are acting without my command.

Bone leans over the man and puckers his lips.

- No, not that, it's obscene, it's against the laws of physics, it's fiction.

Bone kisses him, audibly.

- You'll pay for this.

Bone retreats, now lipless. Red prints mark the man's cheeks.

- I'll punish you for this, it's disgusting, obscurantist plagiarism.. It's a second-hand gesture. It's blasphemy. You'll suffer, Bone. Do you hear?

Bone squats faceless on the floor.

THE DOME

Each night, after sunset but before twilight ebbed, a hot and thirsty wind swarmed from the direction of the dome. As it gusted, thick black swathes of insects streamed within its currents, aiming toward the presumed interior; unaccountable flowers of night opened their purple habits and, as if desiccated in the hot draught, withered as they flowered - within minutes - dry as paper, abundant and self-sacrificial as unreason. A man kept close to the shadows of his cave, eyeing without comprehension the workings of his world. In the distance, the dome glowed pinkly, like an inferior sun.

The man shunned the dome as much as the burly parching blast; once, early in the days he could remember, he invaded the precincts of the sealed half-globe, traversing the sandy tussocked soil of his own paths to a cold and cracked tundra, varied only by the odd violet-crowned tough-stalked stand of what looked like gorse. The dome was exactly in the centre of a mile-wide depression, a shallow tilted bowl rimmed by low ridges and cliffs, which descended, bruised.

Apprehension quivered within him, like a branch from which a bird has launched. His eyes touched the smooth skin of the dome, nervously, his curiosity sniffed its grey opaque substance and, balked, returned.

He walked on across the hollow, finding no other feature bar a small square scattered with dark stones, like a dismembered hearth. He paused and looked at the rocks and a floating unnameable sense of the familiar and loss overran him like a flush of hot and cold, sweat and shiver. For the first time he saw the dome alter, suffused with a pale, humanoid pink. He ran from it like a primitive, afraid of his fear.

The man still limped from being seized by that first onrush of air; twisted from his footing and discarded onto a cleft waiting boulder. So, as the sun set, each night he moiled up a scree-path to his fastness, shying from the atmosphere as a beast from man.

Daylight would find him on foot, labouring on faint tracks for food and memory. Berries fed him mostly, and a soft tasteless but plentiful yellow fruit like a yam. Memories came harder, he could go back no more than one season, although something he could not find rumoured of others. He knew he had a name once, that belonged with others, who had called as he called, spoke in the tongue he now mumbled to the air, the rocks, the shadows. He wore knee-length ripped denim and a white shirt torn at the elbows. He could recall nothing of their origin but knew that they came from *back then* when there were others.

Some nights, he would sit motionless under the sky, in the aftermath of the torrid gale, counting and configuring the stars, telling himself and his fire that it was *up there* where the Others lived, that one day they would come down for him, like a long lost . . . and came back to himself, because he did not know the word. He had been part of them, they him. Or sometimes he would squat, questioning the fire, narrowing his eyes, as if stitching, frowning as he failed to formulate the one, necessary sentence needed to interrogate the dance of the flame.

The days continued and it seemed as though there was nothing that would ever

change. He ate, drank, slept; the purple flowers opened and died; the black insects tunnelled through the air; the dome varied its shades. Then one day a bird flew down to him, the first he had ever known near. It was bald and yellow-beaked and red-taloned. Its eyes were like black buttons. It called to him: 'Ra-tus, ra-tus, rah-too.' he tried to answer but the bird found his dialect strange. It repeated its call and half-rose in the air. The man knew he must follow.

The bird led him all day across the plain, its green and blue plumage coasting on thermals, never so far away as to become a black silhouette among others. For the first time he was aware it was wrong that no bird ever came within identifiable distance, that there was something abnormal in the operation of this world. It felt as though a soft clay wall had fallen in his mind, as if he had breached a furthest-out and weakest of barriers. Night approached and with it the scouring wind. He dug a shallow hole for shelter with his rough hands and lay face down till the storm had flown. He rose and found the bird hovering above. 'Ra-tew,' it said, 'Rah-too.' He went on into the night.

Tiring, late in the morning, he came to a wiry-grassed wind-ruffled promontory. Beyond it, to his confusion, rippled and pearly the unknown mass of something completely alien: the sea. He could only think 'Big water.' Cawing, calling, urgent, the bird dipped down the throat of a gully. Uncertainly, he followed, bewildered by reflecting water and now the beach below. He slipped once, hurting his bad leg further. Hobbling on a pebble beach, he saw the bird circling a wooden structure at the tide's edge. A word returned to him: boat. And big water equals 'sea.' Unknowing still, he sat in the boat, holding an oar like an oversized bone, the bird still circling overhead. The tide began to take hold of his craft, rocking and pulling it into the multitudinous currents. He began to wrestle with the water with the oars in a jerky rhythm. The bird now went ahead again, swooping, calling, hurrying on. Seeping from the horizon like the first sign of a fire, a turning mist assembled its nebulous embankments. The man was troubled by an ache in his memory, something again escaped him, and he looked up to see the bird turn and wheel towards the land. As his fear rose the current swung and boat and mist together closed. The sky blackened and the first fingers of mist clambered on the boat, his hair, his flesh, his worn torn clothes.

Probing, stroking, encircling, the mist shrouded and explored him, curtaining both the known world and retreat from the instinct of light. He shivered in the wet cold as the swell heaved. His mind began to mist, a heavy drowsiness smoked across his eyes. Voices, fugitive, vague, echoed and skirled at the edge of consciousness. He felt as though unknown hands seized and pulled him about in a manic circling dance. The reek of the familiar rose in him like nausea, he knew but he could not name the dance, the voices, the hands. A momentary jagged illumination like lightning revealed a riddling assembly of beruffed sequined figures posing and declaiming to the air, and a motley of the dishevelled, in baggy pants and battered bowler hats. His understanding readied to leap into the scene when, as if a curtain rose, the sun replaced the mist, the waves settled and he woke.

He was drifting towards a muddy estuary at the mouth of a brown turbid river. From the flanks of a slow river extended across the horizon a dense canopy of green, a woody megalopolis of trees sprawling on the land. He could advance to

the river or return to the sea. The choice made itself.

It was about the middle of the day. He felt neither the heat nor hunger nor thirst. He toiled against the muddy currents and edged above the silt banks. The trees grew taller and crowded either side. He remembered a word: 'spectator.' He worked against the river, against its broad slow force. The sun leaned on his head, tiredness began to pull at him. The boat eased from his control and thudded softly aground on the reed banks. He slept.

When the world returned to the man it discovered him supine in a long palisaded grove. Twice a man's height high and a man's length apart, each of the poles was topped by a white jawless human skull. A bonfire huffed and sparked and flurried to the right. The sun was setting. Small flat-headed figures lit torches in a glade. They were *others*. As were the skulls. As he struggled with his realisation, not knowing where or when he was, a bird came down in the grove.

'Rah-too,' it urged, 'Rah-tus.' the man rose, the bird hovered and turned down the grove, the man followed. The flat-headed kind ignored them. A reed and wattle hut, surrounded by flambeaux, waited at the culmination of the grove. The wind began to agitate the flames. The bird stood at the hut's entrance like a doorkeeper. The man walked past it with a side glance, stooped like a suppliant and without knowing why entered the dark inside.

Bent in the blackness to half his height he felt ahead along a round tunnel. Violating the bounds of dimension, it turned and sloped within the small frame of a reed hut. He edged beyond both panic and bewilderment. Doubled, he limped on, until light admitted him and he surfaced, expectant, onto a hushed and grey metallic arena floor. The light was membranous and ghostly, barely rouged with a dim pink. The place was like a bare volcanic plain, scant of relief bar mound at its heart. A milky opacity misted its heights. He hobbled towards the heart.

The light blushed with a pink suffusion. In the distance, black columns rose slowly in the air like smoke. Ahead, the mound resolved itself into a lean form in dark green bound on a high backed wooden chair like an old throne. Before it, like an audience, a dozen stones meditated in an oblong of sand. The figure was human but had neither eyes, nose, mouth nor hair. Over its grotesque extended ears on a red cushion rested a skull, jaw protruding the edge. A mist wisped low from the floor, lapping his feet.

The man reached the rock garden and paused for a while at its head. He then squatted down, looking from the stones to the faceless face. The creature, bound at the wrist, upturned its palms. The man crossed his legs and sat. the skull began to speak:

*Bone above the stone in the sterile garden;
Dome above the throne on the metalled floor.
Who the bird's wing follows through a black door
Finds himself alone without release or pardon.*

*The answer to the dome's in the bowl of the skull
In an actor's hand within the depths of a well
That the mist obscures on the bare plains of hell.
This is the emptiness that brims the cosmos full.*

Then, as the skull's jaw clamped shut, a trap door opened and, as if weightless, the man fell in no direction, through the unspace of an infinite well. Battlements, towers, thrones and arches turned about him. He began to spin, bending to centrifuge, and became an oblate ball swimming in the spiral tail of a white star. The star was a sperm, spat upon space by time. Gravity pulled again at him and he found himself unborn in a black womb. Bent in the darkness to half his height he backed away along a round tunnel.

As if bowing, the man backed out of the hut. A bird kept the entrance like a guard. A hot strident wind turned and disturbed the flames of the torches that circled the hut and the ravenous bonfire piled in the glade. The flat-headed others, almost naked, began to ululate and dance. A black sun rose in the twilight. Purple-budded flowers pushed from the earth. The yellow-beaked bird lofted green and blue wings and, calling to the man, lifted into the air. 'Ra-the,' it hummed, 'Rah-ti, rah-tus.' the air's agitation burgeoned; the bird arched beyond the grove; sparks from the troubled torches and the distended heap of fire spilled onto the hut. It smouldered then, as at a command, bellowed out in flame. Hoomph, it blew. The flat-headed kind screeched and keened and fell on each other; the purple flowers unfolded their sex; the black sun dissolved into an insect swarm and the man limped on, guided by the bird.

It flew high over a rough path that cut through the strangling density of the wood. The man looked back at the clearing: black metalloïd insects burrowed into the heads of the purple flowers and the flesh of the cavorting clan. The hut disappeared, engorged by the flames. The flowers withered as the tribe died. Sickened by the senseless harvest, he turned to the forest and, a lame man, ran.

He tripped, on the tangle roots, he slid, on the mud path, he shouldered and forced through the wood in the dying light. Erect, hoofed, a head taller than him, an antlered creature with his own face stood for an instant across the path, then it snorted, as if in dismissal, and commingled back into the shade. Water ran ahead of him, twisting over rocks and reeds, skeltering, bending to the earth. He found a white thrashing stream and, hard by, a bushy slope crowned with the likeness of a cairn. He pulled himself up to the stones. In the blackening distance, to the west, ringed by the broken silhouettes of low crags and cliffs, as bright as the first light and no longer pink but blood red, glowed the dome.

Yellow-beak settled by the stream. It looked at him but did not call. He knew his future now. He no more belonged to his forgotten name. He stepped down from the slope, down into the ice-fingered flow, down into his dissolution. And as the water scaled his head and his self slipped into the reflected stars, for a fractured second before the lung-agony and the choking and the blackness, he knew he had escaped at last, as a soul oiled into its flow, entering the stream.

from **THE MANSFIELD SATURDAY REVIEW**

in a like manner, ill as that may be, is
"The Ghost Machine", by an author whose surname
a provincial plainness and earn
sadly forsaken here. It is assembl
rag-bag of verse, prose and mal
theatre, of burlesques and borrowed tones,
flesh torn from the dead - Beckett, Marlowe, Dost
ill-wed to what feels like mysti
i.e. wet and soggy. Desperately imitating
ashionable yesterday, self-conscious self-mock
ods after Gray or Borges or Lem
dermining the (non-existent) unity
ppending a fictitious, hostile review
ostensibly by me! I can at least congrat
his foresight. One cannot accuse him of ecumen
chauvinism: he happily slaps on a whiff of (decay
ristianity here, a hint of stale Buddh
strong feeling of science fiction in the fi
author's natural taste lies, when stri
tellectual pretensions. In short, this
without coherence, point or purpose
tomfooled by such frantic lunges at signi
failed anagrams (e.g. Eneon) the vague impr
dramatic history (i.e. Shakespeare's princes
ckett's tramps) the sketchy explora
servant relationship (e.g. Bo
rst of all, the mindless recur
and leitmotifs - the mist, the dome, the sto
etcetera etcetera. One can only hope tha
still young enough to mend the foll
useful occupation such as a doorkee
or temporary typist, such as I belie
Job Creation Scheme.

Ernest Channing-Cheetah

~~ON MR. COWLEY'S ODES~~

On Something Else, the Bounty thereof.

**O laureate wise and noble singer
Not since the crowning of Apollo's bays
In those antient days
Did any pluck the lyre with surer finger!
Nor did the shepherd's feet
Ere dance as fleet as to thy numbers sweet!**

**Such tuning of th'immortal spheares
On our royal Britannic shore
Hath ne'er been known before
Than in thy sweet song's fall on mortal ears.
Thou greet'st thy reader with a sage's feast
That ne'er gives more, than when it offers least.**

From the Remains of that seer, scholar and gentleman Mr. Christian

Rosenkrantz Bircumshaw

(no antecedent of this author)

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THE DEMENTIA OF PROFESSOR HAPPENSTANCE
(a farcical reconstruction)

Personae:

Baboon troop with typewriters (p.p. an infinite number of chimpanzees)
Prof. Happenstance, Head of the Laboratory
Matilda, a cleaner
Nutt, Brown and Case, assistants on secondment to the Lab.
Our Poet, a.k.a. the doorman

Scene:

The Coalville Cavendish Laboratory towards the end of the 20th century. A room of grey and white terminals and consoles, of flickering green screens, wire trays stacked high with paper and gleaming metallic tables. A troop of baboons, each of which is secured to a seat before a typewriter, occupy a deep cage at one end. Wires from the cage connect to a wall speaker and screen. The Professor is deep in discussion with his assistants. The baboons begin to type.

Baboons To be or not to be, that is the Qusted.
Prof. Excellent. 95% duplication, 100% reduplication of run 107 @ 33b.
Gentlemen, I believe we are the brink of success.

Nutt
Boom Absolutely. Indubitably.

Case Undeniably.

Baboons A verse, averse, our kingdom is a hearse.

Puzzlement and concern wrinkle the domed foreheads of the scientists. The assistants peer frantically at readouts.

Nutt Deterioration of Improbables.

Boom Unlikelihood unstable.

Case Abnormality critical.

Assts(all) Warning! Meltdown! Warning! Meltdown! Warning!

Prof. Enough! Peace. Originality vectors variable.

(at controls) Likelihood of Hackenshaft effect 3.2 rising.
Reverse typewriter feed, reverse type –

Assts(all) Feed reverse jammed. Feed reverse jammed.

Baboons Who would not abdenture for such merchant ice?
Who would not conventure for such parod eyes?
This must give us paws, this puddles the Will.

LIKEWISE:

Baboons *Thou dost affect the royal in thy speech.*

Prof. Overload! Duplication crash. Originality invasion. Breakdown of banality field.
Boom, call security. Case, switch –

Baboons Why what but why what mine but my what why?

Prof. No, no! Order is all. The degradation of
the predictability of the unpredictable,
the control of the uncontrolled, doth rank
and steep against the vantage of our state.
The very certainty that rests embower'd
in the pleasant suburbs of security
becomes the beast of madness when the sure
and fixéd balm of number-reining law
turns to a dark hell that munches roses
ranked in figured nature on the lawn.
That way dementia lies. That way lies.

**He begins to break connections, upend terminals, beat at screens. Nutt,
Boom and Case try to restrain him but fail. Worriedly, they confer.**

Nutt Project's end:

Boom Technicians' meeting:

Case Events to ditch:

Assts(all) Our names to save. Records dump and let's unhitch.

**They begin to erase records but leave, unscientifically untidy, upon hearing
footsteps.**

Enter security, in the guise of 'the door', Our Poet.

Poet Did somebody want me?

The Professor is sitting in front of the baboon cage, making simian noises.

Smoke rises from the terminals, befogging the room.

Baboons Ill-sits my reason with this heavie heure.

The gross enfumed mist that ranks and steeps –

Enter Matilda, mop and bucket in hand, cigarette in mouth.

Mat. Nora bleedin' Bucket! What the - hoi, gormless, (to Poet)

give us a hand with this. Eh, the old prof don't

look too good, does he, eh? Wassallthisabout, eh?

Poet I dunno, I only work here, you know.

They clear up the mess in the smoky room. Poet looks for a fire extinguisher.

**The Professor gibbers softly, restored to capitals if not sanity. The baboons
type faster and faster, red lights begin to dance, an alarm sounds bleatingly
and a printer disburdens a mass of sheets.**

Poet(reads) 'The Ghost Machine or a Fit in Four Bits'

**Puzzled, he tucks the sheets under his arm. He and Matilda gently coax the
professor from the room. The smoke thickens as the plot thins.**

THE GHOST MACHINE ANOTHER DIMENSION

First published on three consecutive days in the spring of 1994, The Ghost Machine shares its anniversary with successively: the discovery of the Planet Paradoxica, the disappearance of the actress Patricia Personica and the death of the composer Harmon Harmonica. It is typical of the fog of confusion enshrouding its birth that editions 1 to 3 are also the first edition, while the order in which the texts were received by the printers was the reverse of the order of publication. Thus, from the beginning, was the first last and the last first.

As the author's imputed aim derived from a dispute with the laws of physics, in particular the boorishness of entropy, founded on his alas lost discourse 'The Divine Being Expressed In Irrational Numbers', chaos and disorder formed the plan of his work. Characteristically he made public a volume of irregular verses, all copies of which have since sunk under the weight of their thick, dense obscurity, which bore the same title as his philosophical investigation.

The tactic of The Ghost Machine is modelled on urban guerrilla war, a familiar occurrence in the late twentieth century. This author, whose life was alone outstanding for its disorder, had arrived at a view of just proportion and rational harmony as an alien occupying force, to be harried and embarrassed by a subterranean band of displaced poems, homeless dramas and dispossessed prose. Genre he cast off to the howling winds, register he mixed like a blind painter's colours, plot and development he shut in a black locked box. He assaulted the core of character and identity. Essential to his scheme was the notion of an authorless book: the Book as Orphan. Thus came into being The Ghost Machine. Unchecked by the bounds of convention, unsupported by adherence to the natural, abandoned by its author in its infancy, the book assumed its own momentum, barnacled itself with additions and accretions, beginning with the pirated and memorial volumes collectively known as the 4th edition. Once established the process was irreversible. Like the rough rustic songs of the folk tradition, handled and altered through the generations, or the anonymous graffiti on obscure walls from Pompeii to New York, or broad jokes that stow across oceans and centuries, the book once begun kept beginning again. To those who search for the authors of the Great Expansion, I say to you you toil in vain : no-one wrote The Ghost Machine.

A book that writes itself re-writes itself. Constantly changing yet always same, analogous to genetic replication, but not constrained by population boundaries, the process of self-repetition can be stopped only by total extinction -from ultimately inhabiting the whole, known Universe. Therefore, in order that the proliferation of Ghost Machines cease, all copies, past, present and future would need be destroyed. Erased, expunged, eradicated quite. As the infection of reality has already begun, and in reality time cannot be reversed, this would be inadmissible to the laws of science. Laws which our author sought to despoil. An unrestricted fiction in a *fictionable* but referential world denies and destroys the realities of that world. Thus will all be ghosts in a ghost machine.

One school exists which proposes we *unwrite* the book: although elegant metaphysics there is no practical means to do this. Typing out the book backward

or erasing it in reverse are as ineffective as the charms of primitive magic. Indeed, the idea could be seen as a symptom of the empirical decay the book has wished upon us. It must also be observed that, post-11th edition, the book's mutation rate has increased at such a tempo that no one authority can be said to know *all* of The Ghost Machine. Therefore we remain spectres in our own glass, confounded by that which is not but everywhere is. For what are fiction, drama, verse, but space without dimension, time without duration?

If it were possible to excise an event from the past, for instance the Sino-Roman treaty of 1744, or the failure of the Prussian revolt against the Dane in 1870, or the Imperial Palace's abandonment of its *private* espousal of the Christian faith in 1661, is it not undeniable that in consequence the whole of present actuality would be changed? So, if we were able to remove the contagion that besets us, would we not also succeed in removing ourselves? To alter history once is to alter history forever. And if the aim of the book was to subvert reality, a reality its author's ill-mind maligned, then by its destruction it would attain its ultimate success. Its ghosts we are, and it must haunt us evermore. It lives by its failure and our lives are its dreams.

From The Sadness Of Hilarius Hilaricon, 2278

**IMPORTANT MANAGEMENT ANNOUNCEMENT IMPORTANT
MANAGEMENT ANNOU**

**GHOST MACHINE MANAGEMENT SERVICES INC. APOLOGIZES TO
READERS FOR THIS INTERRUPTION FROM A PARALLEL
DIMENSION. A DIGICOM FAULT WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE
CROSSOVER TRANSMISSION. WE HOPE YOUR ADULATORY
EXPERIENCE HAS NOT BEEN IMPAIRED. ANY QUERIES CONTACT
CUSTSERV ON **1131#44556677 END MESSAGE.**

**THREE SPARE PARTS AND A SCREW LOOSE
FROM THE GHOST MACHINE**

**I
From her Exercise Book**

**THE ORIGINAL POEMS OF
Enconomia Economica (aged eleven)**

*The Ghost Machine is shiny like the crown of the Queen
And sits there and counts out
The things that day by day are put about
The lectures, courses and broadcasts I mean
The programs and programmes, the mass-religious cults
The art-works and paperbacks
And the important results
Of this professor's that professor's latest books.
All the world's resources
Are surrendered to its forces
All the hungry peoples
And the cities crumbling by the day
Like old neglected temples
While trade rots on the quay*
As alike to the nations of the rich and poor
Only the ghost machinery hums on the factory floor.*

THE END.

this poem I call the Ghost Of The Machine and I think it employs what Miss Loveridge calls a metaphor. Or something like. EE.

***(!, Ed.)**

II
From her Exercise Book again

THE POETIC DIARY OF
Enconomia Economica (age 12)

Karl is not my favrite - he has bad breath
an is to insistent - he wont leave me bee
Maynards okay sort of - but don't like girls
Adam Smith's a tight git - Ill no go out with him
 J.K's American - *really*
 all the girls like him

He's so self-confident - Penny Pound said
shee saw him smoking a *cigar* back behind
the bicycle shed - I wouldn't smoke myself
think of the environment - but he's *daring*
 I could only ever wed
 a boy who was bold

Oh dear, Karls hear again - goin on about
me *pretending* to be unpredictabull
OK Karl - you believe what you want - I dont
He is commanding though - in a rough cut way
 I do wish J.K didnt smoke
 hell burn up the globe

Wonder will ther ever be
the right boy for me?
THE END

this poem is my first in what are called syllabics - silly abics id say, and they are very hard to do like maths. I dont like maths but my teachers reckon ill have to pay for it in years to come if I cant do my sums. EE.

THIS ENTRY decoded by **GM Decryptics Ltd** a division of **MEAN-U-WANT**.
For all private puzzlements or corporate decipherment access **ZBC??random-random 373**.

III

from her Diary (not to be opened till 2021)

the very private thoughts of Enconomia Economica (aged 13)

- Tues, the 1st** Karl came round again - he wanted to show me his chains - whi I dont no - I fought they lookd rather rusty. JK's dads going to bye him a *car with a showfur* for his birthday - Miss Lovaridges complaynin about my spellin - she says its deteerioratin - well im just fed up with all those sily rules
- Thurs, the 3rd** Met the new boy at scool - Shoomaker - he realy is beautiful but mutch to small. Penny Wise says she saw Karl sharing a *seegar* with JK back of the bicycl shed. I always thought those two were in cheroots. Sily, I meen *cahoots*.
- Wed, the 9th** Dennis Green hasnt a clew - he wants *mee* to go out with *him* on his pedal bike - ugh all thos traffick fumes - I hate smoke - and think of the discomfoot. Had to see the head teecher about my spellin - well hes not teechin my head, so ther
- Fri, the 11th** Karl *again* - rattlin his chains - are they off a cycle I wander - I just dont sea what hes gettin at - he makes my head tird an my spellin go bad - keeps sayin I dont behave the way I shd - doesnt he no I have a mined of my own? when he gets angry he starts lookin the same color as is chains - rusty red
- Sat, the 12th** What a shock about Adam Smith - he went bezerk in his back gardn last week and has bin confind in an Institut - who wd have thought ther was anything interestin about him? He must have kept an aweful lot in that tight fist. Letter 2 my dad about my speling - im not developing as I shd
- Sun, the 13th** saw jk in the park - he likes to talk bigg - noticd he has a bad cough - Im starting to think hes just a showoff
- Tues, the 15th** Tired of all the boys - everything keeps going round in circles - theyre all in the same game together - I think ill just keep to myself with the girls from now on - the boys have got just know idea of how to treat me - any of them

From Our Crime Correspondent

The pleasant suburb of Grimm's Garden -s was shocked today by the appearance of Ms E- E- (aged 23) in the Magistrates Court on charges of soliciting and theft. A girl of good family, Ms E- E- seemed confused and ill-kempt and is currently of no fixed abode. On the magistrate -s enquiring, she muttered incoherently about cycles being economic. WPC Grimbold stated that the accused was observed flaunting her trade and making obscene gestures with a stolen bicycle pump on the junction of Market St and Loveless Avenue at midnight Friday last. When apprehended she complained of not being understood. The dignity of the court was startled by the defendant shouting about ghost machines and loose screws. The case was adjourned pending social and psychiatric reports. Bail was refused on the request of the force. Ms E- E- 's parents left the court distraught.

READERS LETTERS

As a bicycle owner and psychoanalyst may I protest at your exclusively and vulgarly materialistic case-study of the unfortunate EE. A timely course of analysis, say between items 3 and 4, would have no doubt averted the poor girl's later development.

Sigmundo A. Freind, M.D.
Barking Avenue,
Couchside-juxta-mare

My wife and I found the handling of the theme of personal identity in *The Rock Garden* the ideal pick-me-up for our love life. Taking turns at being buried under stones while wearing a rubber appendage is the erotic stimulant we had always looked for and never found.

Yours gratefully,

Mr & Mrs Loverock, Beds.

Incoherent poppycock. Senseless assemblage. Formless fumbling. Pointless approach. Inconsequent meander. Waste of trees.

Critias Criticus (address supplied)

Please be notified that as an economist and bicycle pump I am contacting my solicitors.

Carla Marks (Miss)
Grosserotelichtestraate,
Foreign Parts

I was very struck by your description of the domestic device Bone. I have been unable to find any record of its registration with the Patent Office. Are you aware of the need for intellectual protection? Have you yet devised your marketing strategy? I feel excited by its potential and am willing to offer my expertise and talk partnership.

The Right Man For The Job
Anytime Anywhere

The point in a pointless machine, the quest in the vale of dispurpose, the dark disconsolation of the sole.

Hilarius Hilaricon
Another Dimension

**VIEWS TO AIR? POINTS TO DISCUSS? TO SEND YOUR LETTERS TO
THE GHOST MACHINE CONTACT YOUR NEAREST STOCKIST FOR
YOUR LOCAL EDITORIAL ADDRESS.**

GHOST MACHINE SELF-ASSEMBLY KIT INSTRUCTIONS

I

FUEL RECIPE

Take three quarts of paradox from your nearest pint-pot. Add essence of dementia. Stir briskly and pepper with molecules. Allow to stand and wait for imagination to rise. Knead two gross of nebulae into a malleable pastry. Add one poppet of whatever-it-is, a broad sauce of parody and a prime choice cut of indignant indigence. Stand well back and light fuse. Never look directly at the sun.

II

CHASSIS ASSEMBLY

Retrieve bones from elephants graveyards. Collect rusting girders from derelict factories. Connect elephant bones (A) to girders (B) using risible appliance (enclosed). Next mount with the best available 'saurian fossil (*Triceratops* recommended) and decorate with leaves torn from *The World's Classics*. Test for balance and dynamics with an improbalometer (not enclosed). Remember, you must not take it out onto the streets or to social functions until you have obtained a proper licence.

III

POWERING UP

Once cooled, remove fuel from centre of crater. Apologize to your neighbours for demolition of their homes. (*Hope they renewed their insurance!*) Next, taking just a sufficient amount, in exactly the *right place*, never elsewhere, pour in a quantity of fuel. When the red indicator flashes on, scam. Beware of ephemera *and* stolid, wooden objects for the first five minutes. If elephants persist, consult your local dealer.

IV

DRIVING YOUR MACHINE

Avoid right turns. Be considerate to other users, particularly the elderly and bicyclists. Take care at junctions, there may be an unexpected development. At all times be humane, remember, machines have feelings too. Watch out for time-hoppers and avoid being caught in their slip- stream. Regularly check your appearance in a mirror - in case of sudden change immediately turn off your Ghost Machine. Do not run engine while standing still as a personal morass might appear, particularly in the vicinity of a carpet.

THE GHOST MACHINE WARRANTY

THIS IS TO CERTIFY that all moving parts, mobile sheets or intercalatory appendices of this Ghost Machine are guaranteed to remain in full working order for the term of their natural lives. Should any part fail to satisfy, and having not been subject to unwarranted emendation, close textual interference or casual deconstruction or any other form of misuse, neglect or abuse, Ghost Machine Services Inc. will replace free of charge the affected section. This guarantee also extends to running repairs on frictionable parts for five years. In either case, if there has been any attempt to open the blue cover, or if any work has been effected by unqualified engineers or disallowed factotums, being any other than those recognized and authorized by the Company, then this assurance will be rendered null and void. The Company reserves the right to forward any claim to our own assessors.

REMEMBER

DO NOT STORE BELOW 55° F

AVOID PUTTING OVER THE HEADS OF SMALL CHILDREN

BEST KEPT FROM PETS UNLESS INTELLIGENCE ENHANCED

(PRIMATES EXCEPTED)

DO NOT PUT OUT FOR YOUR MILKMAN - HE MAY HAVE SENSITIVITY

NEVER LEAVE OUT IN THE RAIN

DO NOT SUBSTITUTE FOR THE CUSHIONS OF CRITICS

SPURN THE CONVERSATIONS OF ECONOMISTS

SHUN THE CULTIVATION OF THE GRAND

EAT NO BEANS ON TUESDAYS

NEVER COUNT ON YOUR COMMANDMENTS

In order to make your claim valid you must fill and return the enclosed certificate of purchase immediately upon receipt. The address to which to return your form is a closely guarded secret and an unspecified prize is guaranteed to the first reader successful in discovering it. (See competition page)

THE GHOST MACHINE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

**OPENING THE
MEETING**

The 33rd A.G.M. of G.M. Management Services Ltd was inaugurated on Tuesday the 15th last by the chairman, Mr Honarius Honorium, in the de-luxe surrounds of the Bangalore Hilton Hotel.

**MINUTES OF
LAST A.G.M.**

Proceedings set forth with the reading of the minutes of the previous meeting which were approved, although their recital at speeds of up to 200 words per sec by a LectroYak did evince certain murmurs among delegates. Following the re- election of the board (unopposed) by the 12 preference 'A' shareholders the chair began its opening address. With a glance at the humorous sallies cast at the co-incident of A.G.M.

**BOARD RE-
ELECTED**

(annual general meeting) with A G.M. (a ghost machine) he reminded delegates and others that under 41 Eliz.II 09.02 that it was not A Ghost Machine but The Ghost Machine being the only such device empowered by law to use the definite article and altogether other than its competitors, such as they were. He then launched into a eulogy to a historic occasion, for the first time, he told the assembly, for the first time in literary history a work of imaginative fiction has opened its doors and held its A.G.M. in public. Applause filled the sumptuous ballroom like balloons. The chair then introduced Friar Economicus, who was to present the financial report.

**HISTORICAL
REMINDER**

**AND A HISTORIC
EVENT**

SACRED ECONOMICS

ASTOUNDING RESULTS

ANNUAL REVIEW

Speaking rapidly, shuffling wads of graphs and bales of statistics, employing algebraic notation publicly and lifting super-dense equations, with an almost liturgical reverence for abbreviations and acronyms, the tonsured director of finance demonstrated how a) sales were only a third down on last year; b) that consequently profit had risen by 75%; c) the Spare Parts business was doing OK; d) that while unfortunately 'B', 'C' & 'D' series shares would not be paying any dividend preference 'A' series stocks would be giving a yield of 500%; e) that wages costs for non-managerial staff had dropped by 39% since the untoward event with the micro-nuclear device at the Staff Xmas Party and that f) the new takeaway franchise in the Cayman Islands was showing promising returns. Friar Economicus then abruptly ceded the dais to the Right Hon. Waldemar I.P.Mollock, leaving behind him a baffled but appreciative silence.

Red bearded and bull chested, Mr Mollock cut an authoritative figure as he outlined the year's events. In his clipped, almost military tone, he detailed targets overcome, competitors outflanked, conquests completed and a loyal staff working as one. With discipline. At the end of his brief address he raised himself erect and straight-backed returned the floor to the chair.

Mr Honorium thanked the speakers and moved that the financial report and review be accepted. Again the vote was unanimous (12 to nil).

Sir Etherede Bananabede was next ushered to the rostrum, to present, the chairman warned, the most contentious item on this year's agenda, the re-appraisal of Company Metaphysical Policy.

**A NEW
DEPARTURE**

Sure and portly but a little breathless, Sir Ethelrede bulked large over the dais, his complexion alternately waxing red and waning pale, like the Great Spot of Jupiter. Although, he said, he was treading on terra incognita, it had been recognised for some time that the metaphysics of the First Edition were out of kilter with the modern world. A recent appraisal by management consultants Hock, Bird and Weedon had shown a 95% mismatch of traditional policy with the needs of today. It was of paramount importance, so that we maintain our market position, especially among the young, that a new metaphysical policy be adopted.

**A DIFFICULT
AGE**

The author of the first generation, he continued, like most of his era, had been beset by the anxieties of an age of transition, nay, outright change. Accordingly many of his insecurities had been (memorably) sublimated into a yearning for a (already demolished) higher meaning which, since the economic renaissance initiated by The Great Expansion, were far from the needs of this age.

**NORTHERN
ORIGINS?**

Therefore, and here Sir Ethelrede mopped his brow, the Company has decided (and proposes) that from now hereupon the former Metaphysical Policy be scrapped a new agenda of benign materialism and smiling scepticism be set in its place. An audible ‘ooh’ was heard from the crowd. Sir Ethelrede smiled, and concluded by assuring the multitude that all honour would still be maintained for the ancient and pristine vision of our original author but that by this change of direction the Company was keeping true to his fundamental aim of an autonomous, authorless book. (Motion carried 12 to nil)

**A POLICY
FOR TODAY**

**ANOTHER
WITTY SALLY**

The chair re-assumed the floor and, thanking Sir Ethelrede, piquantly added that, in all humaneness, the former metaphysics consisted of little more than the distressed longings of a displaced mind. Indeed, there was little to adduce a coherent scheme of thought, more a matter of physical discontent than metaphysical content. From the front row, discreet laughter echoed the chairman's witticism.

Regarding, the new policy, he continued, I would now ask that the following statement be read into the minutes and appended to the Company's Articles:

'Definition of a compass:

an instrument of spatial directional purpose, being aligned in sensitivity to the magnetic poles, and of no account to be employed as a metaphor for time-flow or conceptual orientation.'

He confided to the hall, as the item was passed, that the necessity for the statute would become apparent in the forthcoming security report. Indistinct noises were heard from the back rows at this juncture although happily the stewards attended the disorder with alacrity.

**A TASTE OF
THINGS TO
COME**

The chair now deferred to Erroneous Outgivings K.C. who, it must be said, gave a rather grandiose account of the Company's relations with foreign powers. Bi-lateral treaties, he commenced, had been established with the Russian novel and the picaresque tradition, an agreement was close with *le nouveau roman* and the Theatre of the Absurd on Combined Operational Vigilance on Erratic Reviewers and Teachers (COVERT for short) which would increase security of operation for new editions and, on a minor level, the League of Lyric Poets had entered into a free trade agreement.

**LITERARY
CONQUESTS**

LETTERS OF THE WORLD UNITE

WARRING SCHOOLS

WHAT'S ALL THIS THEN?

He furthermore stated that talks were being instituted on a tri-partite basis between the Company, the OED and the ghost of Noah Webster for a unitary spelling policy which would greatly improve efficiency of production and lower significantly the cost base. Plans were also underway for a joint study with the UN for a global scheme for the standardization of fonts on which he hoped to report progress next year. He insisted that the former problems with Anon and the Folk Tradition plc were at an end and while hostilities continued on the southern borders with the renegade guerrilla forces of the displaced troubadours and minnesingers these were of a minor nature and easily contained. Sightings of rogue prophets in the eastern quarter were down on the previous year and the last epic poet had passed into history in Southern Turkistan during the severe winter.

He relinquished the floor to rather confused and ragged applause, urged by prompt boards and the chair's hand. An air of misgiving settled on the back rows like a mist. Under the brilliant light of the domed ballroom the chairman's visage assumed a sterner aspect, as with a slow deliberation he announced the next item: the Security Report.

WPC Wendy Grimbald held the cynosure of the hall. It was not to her purpose, she affirmed, to enter into sympathetic enquiry or creative dialogue with those subversive elements who sought to unbind the spine of the Book. The moral backbone must be preserved at all costs. She was forced, regretfully, to record that problems with disaffected users were increasing. The primary sources for this were twofold: one, the unabated distribution of illegal copies of Edition 4, she apologized to the sensitive at this point, for employing that profane title, however, duty was her prime directive, and her duty compelled her to report on the ever-rising tide of corruption; second, the growth of unauthorized private versions of Editions 5 plus, compiled by

**REVOLUTION
IN THE HOME?**

groups of the seditious and social misfits and read in their homes without electronic appliances. She was confident that many of these groups were led by agents of rival ghost machines and that when evidence had been compiled the Law would surely take its course. It was of great concern, though, that recent investigations had established that the lawless had devised a method of adapting the standard self-assembly kit to their own ends, *by means of an ingenious application of the simile to the compass, that makes us end, where they begin.*

**THE WHEEL
TURNS**

For this reason, and here she paused, the Company will propose the immediate withdrawal of all do-it-yourself kits. Gasps of dismay and shock escaped her audience.

The Company regrets, she continued, her voice rising higher above the foreground noise, this course of action but has no viable alternative. Unauthorized interpretations and unwarranted interpolations were already infiltrating the outer fringes of the banality field. Serious temporal dislocation had been recorded in the Northern Latitudes whilst one of her own security sub-editors had literally died laughing at an illicit convention-stripper; worst of all, a case of ontological insecurity had been reported only last week in, and here she paused, Head Office. The hubbub swelled into a tumult, the motion was instantly passed (12 to nil) and the security director retired from the rostrum.

**WARNING!
MELTDOWN!
WARNING!
MELTDOWN!**

Stewards vainly distributed placidummies, care-freezers and easygoes among the throng; with outward composure but who knows what inner disquiet Honarius Honorium again commanded the stage.

It is now, he announced, merely for us to observe tradition and ask that time-honoured phrase - are there any questions from the floor?

**HONARIUS
HONOURS
THE PAST**

Not expecting a reply he half-turned to go when a reedy Lancastrian voice piped from the anonymous ranks of the back rows. The chairman peered at its owner without finding focus, as if at a man with no face. ‘Alfred Wrathbone, Nelson and Colne, wishing to address the floor.’ Honorium’s face hardened: ‘You have precisely 2 minutes under the time-rule Mr Wrathbone.’

**ALF SPEAKS
OUT**

‘As a Northerner’, Mr Wrathbone began, ‘I like to pride myself on plain speaking and speaking plain and as I was Alf to me mam and dad I’m Alf to all’, Alf went on, ‘and I can’t sit here an not say owt about why it is there’s only 12 as votes. And them’s the same 12 as sits on Board. I think’

**THE ROUT
OF ALF**

A hooter blew like an inflated bicycle horn. Beaming the chair apologized to Mr Wrathbone - ‘Alf I said’ Alf protested - but sadly intoned the chair he had used all his time and his question was therefore invalid as incomplete. ‘Next please’ the chair called, readying to abscond the floor, when a large American type stood up to his six feet four in height. ‘J.J.Schuckmayor, L.A. - wishing to address the floor on the fault ...’

The hooter honked again. ‘How unfortunate, Mr Shockmire’, the chair hastily pattered, ‘it seems we have just encountered a time-distortion field’. He regretted that the meeting had in fact expired some 90 minutes ago, 2 hours having elapsed in the last 40 seconds. He began thanking all concerned and spoke of our hallowed anthem ‘*There’ll always be a spectre*’ when a barbed epigram struck his head.

GOTTERDAM- ERUNG

Uproar arose, complaining of being personified, pandemonium ran amok, despairing at the invasion of clichés. Fusillades of fiction flew through the air, upended odes served as improvised barricades, belle-lettres hid sobbing in the shadows, reams of autobiography suffocated the innocent, loose elegies cavorted in the aisles and crazed panegyrics parched then dehydrated in their combined hot air. The Irish Renaissance declared its independence, kitchen-sink dramas crumbled without repairs and the Spirit of Revenge trod murderously in the dark. Security forces wrestled with suicide squads of free verse and the Great Tradition laughed without humour on the dais. It was only after a combined re-pagination and a swift editorial coup, followed by a sharp pruning of concordances and a rationalization of indices that order, albeit dishevelled, returned. The chair closed the meeting without a word.

**(Thus ended the first, and last, open AGM
of the Ghost Machine - Ed.)**

PUBLIC ORDER ANNOUNCEMENT

DESPITE the breakdown of the former Management the re-convened Board of The Ghost Machine is fully in control of all circumstances, comparisons, tropes and symbols. The new Metaphysical Policy is to be strictly enforced and the following Security Promulgation supersedes all previous codes:

- 1** - A total curfew is imposed on all movements in the dark night of the soul.
- 2** - Any unlicensed longings, unfocused yearnings or other-worldly leanings to be reported to the Authorities at once.
- 3** - All cross-genre dressing and tradition swapping is banned.
- 4** - Parodies and formal upendings only to be conducted by Company Personnel.
- 5** - Variorum editions and complete concordances not to be allowed out on loan. Accredited scholars may consult copies on Security Clearance. (Apply to WPC Grimbold)
- 6** - Possession of unauthorized editions is punishable by ruthless revision.
- 7** - Do-it-yourself kits restricted to formal public meetings at Company Booths on Sundays. Attendance compulsory.
- 8** - No additions shall be made to the Readers Letters Page. The projected Notes & Queries Page is hereby forbidden.
- 9** - All verbs and common nouns to assemble for regulated aerobics in public parks and squares at 7 a.m. Mondays to Fridays.
- 10** - Any alterations to the patterns and fabrics of time and space textiles may be produced only by Company Workshops.

BY ORDER OF THE MAN

THE FIRST DAY OF THE NEW ERA

from the author's notebook: grand parade and review of progress

On the balcony of Head Office stands The Man, his chest festooned with decorations; WPC Grimbold, anxiously glancing from side to side; Sir Ethelrede, now completely red-faced and senile, muttering to himself in broad Yorkshire; The Chief Medical Officer, a lean and pallid figure shivering in the winter air in his lab coat.

The Grand Parade begins with a spin by of Economists On Bicycles, each turns to the balcony and, saluting, falls off, owing to a lack of control. Muttering excuses, they re-mount and depart.

There follows a Gymnastic Display by fresh-faced and wholesome cohorts of Ghost Machine Youth. Polite applause from the balcony. Ecstatic cheers from the watching crowds. For obscure reasons, WPC Grimbold makes hurried notes of the names of female gymnasts.

As the north wind blows, hanging from the balcony, the draped banners of Ghost Machine Warranties billow in the cold. The Man smiles on the crowds.

A march past of The Others begins. Formed into ranks of nostrums, bye-words, I-Know-What-You-Mean's and That's-What-They-Say's they drag past for an interminable epoch, sending all the audience and Head Office Personnel into a refreshing sleep for several millennia.

Enlivened by repose, the Board beam with pleasure and, brimming banality, applaud as Eneon and Nogniht are led out to the crowds. WPC Grimbold announces that they are guilty of personal identity. Eneon is in addition a failed anagram and suspected of implied ambiguity. She demands their confession and contrition. Both fall on their knees, sobbing with repentance and blaming their downfall on an unspecified author. Both embrace their guilt. To tumultuous applause, Eneon is restored to anagramacity, becoming Oneon, and he and Nogniht volunteer to be unscrambled. No-one and nothing, they vanish into inexistence.

The Bone Minstrels, wearing faceless masks, tap-dancing to typing baboons, lead a celebration of justice. BONE IS OURS banners wave in the throng, blank unprinted tee-shirts celebrate the lives of Oneon and Nogniht. To frenzied adulation, a marble head of The Man, sixty foot high, is unveiled. His bald cranium is formed of a pink, glowing Dome.

The Military Parade begins: fierce platoons of destructive analysis, tank formations of hostile reviewers and tight bands of coteries strut and power by, at one in their loyalty to their leader. The square is cleared for a progress of the deadliest weapons: trailing dead birds and withering flowers, mutual admiration societies vaunt, pomp and snigger, excluding all air from the lungs of Outsiders.

from the author's notebook

Dimension limiters and troops of sappers armed with metaphor cutters end the parade. In the distance is heard the rumble of controlled explosions of underground parodies. Now, bound in a chair aloft on the shoulders of minor officials, Bone is paraded to view. A skull sits on his head. The crowd cheers and cheers.

The Man speaks to the many-headed throng. He tells of the threat of The Shadow, of how agents of the uncapitalized bare man have infiltrated the Company. To his words, the *men* are led out and publicly executed by instant characterization. Afterwards, each is lead away variously as A Man In The Street, A Good Citizen, A Steady Sort Of Bloke or Typical Member Of The Public.

An Interval follows. The Board Members and Senior Officials retire for a private reading of Edition 4. Banality prophets entertain the crowds, clowns juggle obvious rhymes and slight stanzas and Just Like Real Life machines gossip with women and children.

The Board resume the balcony. To triumphal music and unspontaneous applause and inaudible to the crowds they declare The Declaration Of The State. News-whisps and rumourizers run about the masses. To loud and

uncomprehending huzzas, The Man, who no longer possesses torso or limbs, is held aloft by WPC Grimbold and proclaimed The Head Of State. The Chief Medical Officer warns of the dangers of the laughing disease. Friar Economicus preaches the gospel of global poverty and rationing of resources, Head Office Staff (now renamed The Party) excepted for reasons of National Security.

WPC Grimbold calls for an end to private convictions. To compensate, The State will increase public convictions and inaugurate mass executions of deviant spellings and irregular verbs. The Head Of State announces the immolation of Bone in the walls of Party HQ (formerly Head Office). A slab opens in the walls and Bone is drawn on an ox-cart across the square when a mist-bomb explodes on the balcony. In the sudden bewilderment, a liberation squad led by Ms EE, Hilaricus Hilaricon and Alf Wrathbone (nicknamed Red Alf) seize the ox-cart and escape with Bone. They confetti the crowd with freed verses, roguish epistles and gliding, wing'd similes, then detonate a controlled platitude, throwing the security forces into the arms of confusion machines. The author, in personacity and opposition to monumental statuary, refuses the episode anything other than casual dress. The disappointed episode goes of f for a night out with friends. On the statue of The Head Of State, the Dome fades to an undistinguished grey.

ADVERT-I-PAGE
READ

ADVERT-I-PAGE
READ

ADVERT-I-PAGE
READ

ESCAPE the limitations of the quotidian. Take Virtual metaphysics (Government Approved) available in liquid or powder form. For **Regular Supply** visit your local *Illusory Tavern* □ *virtmet* a name to conjure with.

BANALITY SUFFERERS everywhere - new **WASH YOUR HEAD OUT** (100%) guarantees controllable surprise. For rinsing of cliché and refreshment of parts of speech, undiluted or dilute, with friends or without, in the home or at parties in squares, drink washout 100% nectar

TEDIOUS FEET? Tired comparisons? **SOOTHO-SMOOTHO** takes away those everyday aches and pains. Recommended for the over-forties. *As tested on Arnold Bennett novels and Movement verses.*
SOOTHO-SMOOTHO EVERYDAY

EREWHON TOURS PRESENT a unique opportunity for the frustrated and adventurous. Go Safari or back-pack trek across the virgin plains of uninhabited paper - see the world as no-one sees it. Guaranteed free of content and bereft of issue.

impotence relieved by mental ticklers. *Contact Samantha, first left from the Central Company Booth. Discretion assured.*

FIRST NATIONAL DIKTAT

as dictated by the head of state, a memo

CLASSIFIED DOCUMENT

- 1, Owing to the chronic chronological negligence of The Author certain subversives from unrelated time zones have been able to join forces. In order to negate this temporal liberalism we have inaugurated the New Era. To totalize effectiveness of time-control in future all years will be security-coded. Possession of codes will be restricted to Party Members.
- 2, That the name The Company shall be removed from public usage and replaced by the title of The State. The former noun shall be exiled on penalty of redefinition by linguistic abuse.
- 3, The Director of Public Opinions and the Historical Deputy will discover an episode proving the erstwhile Bone a fraudulent object and a new-found Bone Of The State alone authentic. **(This episode omitted from this selection, Ed.)**
- 4, WPC Grimbold will despatch an assassination squad to Another Dimension to sub-editorially delete Hilarius Hilaricon. Agents will also seek out Professor Channing-Chow, the object being a retrospective ordering of Ghost Machine Dates & Events.
- 5, Relations with The Author will be by diplomatic channels only. As far as the masses are concerned He Is Dead. State Booths will institute a Memorial Service each Sunday.
- 6, Transmission of The Book shall be the prerogative of State Channels. No independent productions shall be allowed. All manual copies to be withdrawn from Public Libraries.

**FROM THE HEAD OF STATE, FIFTEENTH DAY OF THE YEAR
CLASSIFIED.**

liberation army memo

this document was leaked to us by the late penny wise - may her memory be
honoured

OBITUARIES

HILARIUS HILARICON will be missed by many in Another Dimension. As a scholar of The Ghost Machine he was unrivalled in his generation and, although not perhaps the most rigorous of thinkers, he was loved by all for the passion of his intellections. Known also as the Rueful Jester and the Sorrowful Smiler, he developed a close friendship with The Author (or, as they would have it, the author) after the rescue of The True Bone. His disappearance subsequent to the explosion of a chronograph meter at the Institute of Geo-Temporal Research was attributed by many to the agents of The State, whose opponents he had supported in their struggle, memorably by the chronological massage that rescued Ms EE from suspended inanimation (i.e. hanging about on nothing in nowhere) . A memorial service will be held next Tuesday at the Crossing. **From many in many dimensions.**

SIR ETHELREDE BANANABEDE formerly an employee of a forbidden world*. A true son of his shire. **From P.P.Underling p.p. The Head Of State THE PRINTED WORD** died quietly in its sleep during an Outside Broadcast. Its many children will carry on its name through the circuit boards and logic gates of ElectroSpeak. The Word is dead, long live the Word.

From all at Logos & Co. and Alphabeta primary and high.

**(interesting slip, should be 'word')*

– Ed)

BIRTHS

TO MR AND MS EE

This Tuesday last, a smiling bouncy boy, HH. Congratulations from all in the liberation army. **WHO LOVES YA, BABY?**

TRAFFIC REPORTS

Ongoing problems ongo with roadworks in the future indicative.

A spillage is causing delays in the present (imperfect) north of Leicester.

Rough seas have delayed the crossing of French nouns in The Channel.

ECONOMIC DIGEST

Imports of American jargon continue at an alarming rate. Customs Officers have seized a cargo of contraband gerunds at Southampton.

Platitude production at record levels in State factories. The State denies reports of linguistic smog.

High Street shops report extremely good sales in the build-up to drabness. An extra five minutes holiday has been declared for this year's week of celebration, stimulating extra spending.

Unemployment levels among rural dialects have dropped since the revision of the Dictionary.

THE GHOST MACHINE SURVEY

Population - nil to infinity

Borders - nowhere and everywhere.

Principal Cities - Londinium. Eboracum. The City Of Dreadful Night. The Great Wen. Greater Gotham. The Shapeless Conurb.

Mode Of Calendar - Beginning with The Year Classified and so on in an endless series reaching towards The Year Classified

History - Under re-construction (see Principal Industries)

State Religion - Benign materialism. Memorial services for The Author at State Booths. Supervised use of do-it-yourself. Bone Books.

Licensed Unofficial Cults - Beyond The Spine. The Secret of The Hidden Bone. The Wizard of The Dome.

Festivals - Drabness, a week long celebration of the winter solstice. The State Opening of Bone: an annual event in spring, when the walls of Party HQ open to reveal The Hidden Bone.

The Happy Days of Fr.Economicus - a midsummer feast of work without pay and reduced rations.

The Lighting of The Dome. In autumn, redundant rural dialects are voluntarily purged from The Dictionary at the base of the Statue of The Head Of State. The Dome shines crimson bright all night.

Principal Industries — none, however:

Verbiage is harvested throughout the year in the warmer eastern and southern counties. Platitude fields are plentiful underground in the central and northern areas. On their rich seams rests the heart of the national mining and smog creation industries.

Building work on the re-construction of history. Aims to restore damage sustained in the war with time.

Principal Industries (cont) -

Security - the main employer of labour
Includes Dictionary Definition Police,
Grammatical Control HQ, Time-bombing,
Neighbour Watch and Overseas Relations (a.k.a.
Industrial Espionage).

Advertising: which speaks for itself. And no one else. Waste processing and disposal from abroad - this thriving industry is based on the import and destruction or hiding of verbal garbage from foreign powers, particularly the U.S.A. The toxicity problem is dealt with by applied concentrates of familiarity. Spare Parts business: a lucrative trade centred on the endless requirement for Ghost Machine Parts, fuelled on infinity and not to be fulfilled until The Year Classified. Recycling Camps - where errant economists and limp critics perform forced labour on pulping remaindered books thus providing the economy with its supply of unacknowledged paper.

Bicycle Manufacture, which is based on the utilization of obsolete or dated Ghost Machine Spare Parts, thus providing vehicles for forecastings.

Economic Outlook -

Mainly dull. The principal problem lies in the reliance on imported clouds in order to maintain overcast conditions plus the reliance on The Author for all primary products. Attempts to set up an indigenous infra-structure have been limited by a lack of substance and The Author's addiction to Tippex.

Form Of Government - Arbitrary. Despotic. Crowd-pleasing. Lame.

Civil Problems - *That despite the efforts of Authority the liberation army continues to exist and aided by The Author defies sub-editing. Delinquency rates among juvenile verbs and nouns, influenced by untreated verbiage and the inhalation of slang.*

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Q. What happened to Flaminus and Curzon?

Amnesty International, Bolton.

Ed. Unfortunately the development of the duo was cut short by their transmogrification into certain personnel of *The Rock Garden*.

Q. What literary influences are there on *The Ghost Machine*?

Ed. Many. Obviously a kind of semi-Shakespearian blank verse (see *O'er the Top*); Beckett - *The Rock Garden*; *Bone*; Dostoevsky - *Bone* again, closing lines; Milton, vide Mollock's speech; *The Dunciad* (e.g. the final paragraph of the *A.G.M.*); Stanislaw Lem, viz. the *Editor's Prologue* and *The Ghost Machine Another Dimension*; Alisdair Gray - just about everywhere; pulp science fiction (*The Dome*); metaphor-soaked or soused poetry, e.g. Rilke or Mallarmé - *The Dome* once more; James Joyce - the use of parodic narrators or wayward catechisms as in the *A.G.M.* and *From Our Crime Correspondent* (the former) or this page (the latter); Peter Reading and Sue Townsend (!), vid. the poems and diary of EE; and Flann O'Brien (prevalence of bicycles).

Q. What is the purpose of *The Ghost Machine*?

Ed. Consumption of paper. Eating of time. Postponement of the inevitable. Disingenuous fabrication of maps.

Q. Is the Author assured of his ultimate purpose?

Ed. Categorically, no. In reality, a word he shuns, he is lesser than any of his creations and venges his spite on them for his innumerable shortcomings.

Q. Is there any way out of *The Ghost Machine*?

Who asked the last three questions, Leeds.

Ed. Closing the book. Blanking the page. Escape into humanity. The re-ordination of a four-letter word: love (ugh! - The Author). As for your implied second question, the answer lies with our variously capitalized author himself.

Q. What hope do you have for the future of the book?

Ed. To my mind much depends on Bone and Ms EE.

Q. To The Author - Why are you asking so many questions?

The Editor, this page.

Author - I don't know - I just need to talk sometimes.

SITUATIONS VACANT

EDITOR REQUIRED for Ghost Machine. Urgent vacancy owing to attack of unforeseen resignation. Apply - The Author, 5, Hangover Square.

READERS LETTERS

Sir,

may I complain in the strongest possible terms about the previous page. It had no semblance to a Letters to the Editor feature being merely a re-hash of the author's meanderings about the course of his work. Did any of the (non-existent) correspondents have any opinions of their own to express? Or does the author imagine other sentient beings to be nothing more than the echoes of his own interrogations?

I am, sir, cancelling my subscription forthwith.

Yours,

**Eric Wrathbone
Open University Student
Strangeways.**

You can tell that bloody Mr EE that if I get my hands on him he'll regret the day he came into print.

**Enamoricus Amoricon
A Previous Page**

As a High Street shop owner I would like to correct the poor picture your pages have given of our soon-to-be-celebrated festival of Drabness. For many, young and old alike, all across the land the unbinding of the yoke of midwinter is the high point in the low of the year. Because of it families re-unite, friendships resurrect and smiles and laughter appear on both the freshest and most wrinkled of faces. From an economic angle, it is the very spur and pulse of the retail trade, without which many of the nation's smaller and friendlier stores would disappear.

**Evangeline Soap
The Whipping Shop
Cheam**

AS a figure of speech and feminist may I register my thanks for the positive portrayal of wing'd similes in the final paragraph of **grand parade and review of progress** coupled with my concern about the current metaphorical status of Ms EE. Clearly a comparison of a stressed and undeveloped girl in a hostile world to our understanding of economic science in her early appearances she seems, in more recent pages, to have developed signs of heroine tendencies. Positive as that may be, it bears little comparison with the subjugation of both woman and nature in a male dominated world.

From **Rosy-Fingered Dawn, Hellas.**

SECOND NATIONAL DIKTAT
as promulgated by the head of state, a memo
CLASSIFIED DOCUMENT

- 1, Because of the insolence, free speech, ridicule and disregard of security pronouncements in recent pages, all relations with The Author to be severed. Party members to proclaim The Dome the true Author on the first of Drabness next.
- 2, Enamoricus Amoricon is appointed Head of Counter-Insurgence. His brief, to extirpate the leaders of the liberation army.
- 3, WPC Wendy Grimbold to be reduced in rank to Police Dog WPC Grimbold in punishment for lapses of Ghost Machine State Security.
- 4, All Party Members to look forward to 2 weeks annual holiday, at their own expense, in The Recycling Camps. Suppression of the noun 'paper' forthwith. Camp produce to be renamed 'Leisure Tokens'.
- 5, The Hidden Bone to be shown in permanent holograph before the eyes of unbelievers at The Crossing. In addition a life-size replica to be paraded each Friday.
- 6, The secretarial staff to be immured in new offices within Party HQ Wall. Ventilation, food, drink and artificial lighting to be provided subject to performance results.

FROM THE HEAD OF STATE, DAY 342 THE YEAR CLASSIFIED

this document was discovered among the dictator's
remains after his disappearance on the execution
of his command to exclude the author
jake, liberation army archivist

Prior to the declaration of perpendicularity but after the deletion of The Party, in the resuscitated summer of The Year Once Classified, as the calendar turned itself back, flipping over with joy at the alteration of authority and the liberation of spelling, and exiled nouns, dispossessed verbs, expropriated pronominals and very indefinite articles carolled and caroused in the capital, just before, although not very long, the return of the untoward, the True Bone was restored to The Land.

After the Author's decision, in the freshly depopulated offices and corridors of Party HQ the first, curious and cautious adjectives peered. The liberation army emerged from under the ground and, led by Red Alf, Mr and Ms EE and Jake the archivist, they declared the Disappearance of The State. All prohibitory pronouncements revoked. Free use of do-it-yourself. Drabness defunct. Dictionaries for all. Recycling camps closed. Travel warrants freely available for The Crossing. State Booths to become hostels for young and adventurous verbs. A vast throng of The Others and the Many-Headed milled around the Central Square, cheering the liberation army. The Statue of The Head Of State was pulled down to the ground and the Dome of its cranium lost all colour and, selfishly, disappeared. Its former supporter was broken, in effigy, and carted off to make rock gardens, crazed paving and unfathomable mantelpiece *objets d'apart*. Standing on the former HQ balcony, Ms EE, with, little HH in her arms, revealed the fabrication of The Hidden Bone and proclaimed the True Bone's return from Another Dimension. WHO LOVES YA BABY and NO HOME WITHOUT BONE banners waved in the square. Celebration lingered throughout summer.

A new festival, The Author's Pen, replaced The Happy Days of Friar Economicus. Remarkably co-incident, on its first day the half-drowned bodies of the financial friar, Enamoricus Armoricon and WPC Grimbold were found on the banks of a lake of correction fluid. Humanely, they were received into intensive care. It was thought by many a sign of authorial mercy and searches began throughout the White Lakes for any other survivors from The Party. By the end of the week all but the Head Of State had been found in various stages of pitiable partial deletion and wretchedly hurried correction. Kind comparisons and careful similes nursed them through the difficult following of months.

Meanwhile, after long debate and contained disagreements of tense, the army moved that the former State be given a noun of its own. Someone, it is not known who, suggested the reconditioning of the old title of the Company. Although it is not known precisely how, by a circuitous indecision and painful wringing of scruples, the Company won the day.

Friar Economicus, after intensive caring, and an apparent vision, dispelled the cynical and delighted the enlightened by announcing his conversion to the True Bone and the first cause. He was accepted into the liberation on The Author's Word. His energy and attack were soon promoted onto a reformed Board. With communications icing-up as winter loomed, he argued the need for a Director of Public Relations. By a majority (8 to 4) vote his proposal was passed. Red Alf, in anger, resigned from The Board. Concerned, Jake the archivist and Mr and Ms EE followed him from the room. Unperturbed, the good friar unveiled the rehabilitated Enarmoricus Armoricon, whom he pronounced fit for the post. With Police Dog Wendy Grimbold trailing on a lead, Ms EE's former would-be-lover was welcomed to the Board (8 to nil, 3 absent). Traffic was becoming a problem in the capital. Since the Recycling Camps were closed, multitudes of economists on bicycles had begun to clot the streets. All wore either Adam Smith or Karl Marx masks which they continually swapped with one another, constantly causing accidents as, owing to their lack of control in the saddle, they fell from their wobbling cycles. Discontent, too, appeared. on the pavement, as indigent critics and unemployed police reviewers begged and pestered the noun in the street. The Others began to murmur and the Many-Headed-Throng looked this way and that. Some sixteen days before the former Drabness, at a cultural festival at the Crossing, in the middle of an exchange of lyrics, a devoweller detonated in the audience, leaving nothing but a few unrelated stumps of consonants of Jake the archivist. In the subsequent nervous rumour, Mr EE, walking home, was set upon by a shadowy gang and, fatally, his initials were removed. By some means, and it is not known how, public relations machines started issuing leaflets and delivering lectures entitled "*Alf's the man to blame*". As angry lexicons of variants and nervous auxiliary tenses crowded the Central Square, Friar Economicus and Enamoricus Amoricon appeared on the Company HQ balcony. They spoke of the judgement of the Dome. They implied the villainy of Alf. They proposed full employment in the processing of waste. As the people cheered, Police Dog Wendy Grimbold ran through the streets, slavering at the scent of a Lancashire accent.

from **THE CHRONICLES OF THE LATTER BONE**

Poor distraught EE, beside herself with grief, had taken both of herself and little HH to the Open House of Bone, which had been sited in a spare part of the former Central State Booth, now the Capital Hostel. Passing by the parties of back-packing verbs and provincial do-it-yourself societies, she was checked at the entrance to the room of the (still bound) True Bone by a melee of disturbed psycho-analysts, all striking each other with damaged parts of primal cycles, and lost without-directions migrant philosophers, who ran to her claiming to be searching for indecipherable addresses on scraps of paper which they ineffectually waved.

At first losing herself in the confusion, EE was brought back by the cries of little HH, who, it has to be said, was getting rather heavy. "Good to see you again.", she told herself and lightly slipped the crowd. Moving quickly, she returned home. A hurried note lay by the door. "*Scram - Alf*", it said, rising to greet her. She thanked the note and, bowing, it left. Without hesitation, she packed necessities and fled.

As she left the capital she began to skip and sing almost like a girl. Little HH, who was growing heavier by the second, had to be put down. To what should have been her surprise, he stood upright and took her hand. She giggled. This was like a cartoon, she thought. "Don't worry, Mom", HH said, "I'll look after you." These were his first words.

All through the long day of trekking that followed, HH, no longer little, continued to grow, while his mother acted more and more the girl. She began to lose height. She kept stopping to scribble coded notes in a diary and it was only HH's patient urging that kept her going at all. She complained that she didn't like this game any more. As her long black hair turned into pony-tails she asked anxiously whether it was time to go to school. HH, by now a young man of twenty, and some eighteen inches taller than her, told her that this was a special holiday and they were on the trail of a mystery. She said she liked mysteries but did hope that none of the boys were in it as they made her head go round. HH smiled, and led her by the hand.

They had arrived at a forbidding land. Rusting wire barbed its perimeter and aged signs, fading like boards outside an abandoned church, warned "*GOVERNMENT WASTE LAND - KEEP OUT*". HH thanked the signs politely but, ignoring their reedy protests, cut the decaying wire and, with EE on his back, entered the unpromising land. EE cried because it was not a nice place. HH cuddled his six year old, telling her they'd be safe here and she mustn't worry, she was just suffering from stress.

By an old leaning oak, he settled on a camp for the night.

The night passed quickly, like an undetected ghost, for the tired, time-switched, pair. The morning found EE stable at six and still six as she slept at seven. HH woke and reconnoitred the scene. As far as he could see a smoky low mist hung on the inferior ground, surmounted by brownish mounds and tumps of almost vegetation. Intermittent ancient oaks leaned at unpleasant angles to the mist, that billowed and waved in slow motion like a sluggish sea.

HH resolved on a bearing to the pale winter sun. Soon, he and his apparent daughter were crossing the ankling mist, EE laughing on his back like the morning's innocent queen. Unidentifiable in the distance, black silhouettes of birds flew and kree'd above, while the baying of a solitary dog prowled ever closer. EE said she liked bow-wows and her son smiled and increased his pace. A strange bird, yellow-beaked and bald, appeared on a mound like a messenger. "Rah-ti", it called to them, "Rah-tus". HH scrambled after it over the bank. The dog neared.

The bird flew ahead over the brown land. HH breathed ever deeper. It seemed as though the hot panting of the dog touched his neck, he turned and almost stumbled as he saw a huge slavering beast not a hundred yards behind. "Ooh, Police Dog" his mother said. Void of its last threads of humanity, the former Wendy Grimbold snarled and fixed its red eyes on them. HH lifted EE into the arms of a leaning oak and braved outwardly towards a hopeless cause. The frothing Police Dog stood still and began to grow even larger, readying for a kill.

"Don't worry tha head, lad", a Lancastrian voice intervened. At the sound of the dialect, Police Dog barked like a crazed dictator and from the sky above Yellow-beak dropped a grey mouse, right onto a clearing of the mist where Police Dog stood. Howling, snivelling, whining, the former Wendy Grimbold pawed and struggled and slipped, trying to climb with ungainly paws the nearest tree.

"You see, lad, it were still human inside". A short, moustachioed man in a flat cap stepped forward. "As I like plain speaking and speaking plain, Alf's the name and what'll I call thee?" The mouse kept Police Dog at bay. "*Hystericus Historicus*", HH said, "or just H". And then he showed the little girl in the leaning tree, Alf's former comrade, EE.

She cried because she wanted to play with the nice Police Dog. Alf lifted her down and told her not to mind because they were going to see someone very special. She brightened at this and mother and child followed Alf, and HH, into another paragraph.

"Young sir and madam", boomed a firm voice from a dark patch on the side of a mound. It belonged to a short stocky gentleman who emerged from the dark patch as if it were a door. "Eric Wrathbone, brother of Alfred, student of human life and the Open University, at your service and that of humanity", drum-rolled Eric. He informed the "young students" that he was "fully apprised of the facts of their situation" having read up to this point during the torment of Police Dog. He welcomed them to the hospitality of his home within the mound and, pleading a necessity of animal welfare, entrusted them to the care of his brother, warning them, however, not to follow Alfred's example in Grammar.

"What a nice strange man" said EE, as Alf led them through the shadow door into The House Within The Mound. They sat down at a table and, with a nod at "young aitch", Alf recounted how he and his brother had variously escaped the hound of Public Relations and imprisonment at the hand of The Author. HH felt a giddy shock of betrayal: wasn't The Author on their side? But he said nothing and, as Alf laid out the table, strange to relate, HH and EE began to look like brother and sister, both seeming about thirteen. EE said she felt safe here. HH seemed moody - hadn't he always believed in The Author? "Tha mustn't worry, aitch," counselled Alf, seeing the change, "Tha's at a difficult age". They settled down to tea and cakes and bread and jam, followed by a delicious pudding, rather like characters in a Victorian story.

Suddenly, as EE was teasing HH about his spots and freckles, Eric returned. Mild as a kitten, but of another species, panted behind him Police Dog. Eric explained how, as a student of nature and philosophy, he had applied a balm of universal principles and a concentrate of trust to the unfortunate former human, and consequently she had recovered to the status of reliable domestic pet, safe alike to adult and child. Wagging her tail, Wendy sat down between EE and young aitch and begged for scraps from the table. "Shake a paw", said Alf and a new alliance was formed.

That night all slept sound in The House Within The Mound.

(to be continued)

the secret adventur diry of EE (aged 13)

for my brother aitch to reid - shd anythin go wrong

Tues (no date) I like it hear at The Hous Within The Mownd - its like bein in a storey - Uncle Ericks tryin to help mee betta my spelin wch is veri kind of him but I think hes goin to find it harde - My brother aitch is veri moody an I had the mowst *straining* dereem lasst niht that he was my sun - imagin it! The other dai, whil we was walkin Wendy we fownd a bigg whole torn owt the middl of the Waist Land - uncl Alf sed it was a bran new Crossin an that when aitch an me are strong enough - an wen my spellins better eric sed - we'll be abl to yews it. I think thats goin to be a reel aventur.

Wed (no date) We had an histori lesson today - ovr uncles tolled us how this waist lawnd usd to belong to sumthing horridd calld the Doom (gess what - I dont no how to spel it) or Doam. Sumtimes I hav trubbell with my uncles axescents. Anyhow this doom/doam turnd everthink ded an brown and went off to the capitill to live on sum wans head - after that ther was Waist Processin an all this land was usd to hide poyson. That was why the Mist. And the onlie resoun we acn liv here is be cos we are *fixshuns* and *can pretend* - Uncl alf sed thats as long as we never giv up our rite to chois. I like our lessons mutch more than *reel* school - Aitch still moodi - I do wish hed talk abowt it, whatever it is. Silly old spot.

Fri. Dont need to put no date now be cos Erics shown me how time isnt rite in this waste land so we can hav daies but no kalendar - its be cos of the cycles an I bet aitch dont know that even doe he thinks he noes more abowt everythink than me - circles see go round an allus end up at the same plaice. But erik says we havnt *got* to stay in them. So full stop: . - hee hee!

**THIS IS THE END OF THE FIRST PAGE
OF MY DIARY
SO IT GHoes FORWUD
NOT ROWND
EE**

my secret aventur diary by EE

second paige

Sun - first day of my speshul calendar

Aitch has bin veri bad - i was makin a rime about his spots (rimes with lots!) when he got angrī an shoutd at me - I sed he shudnt showt at his sistre wenn e sed he waznt my bruvver he was my sun - i told him that was a bad thing to say and it maid me cri - Unci Aif caim in and sed it was a bad thing too be cos it was makin me yunger agen. I didnt understand that becaws ive alwaies bin thurteen but i dont think its veri gud for my spellin. uncle Alf sed I shuldnt be up-set wiv aitch az he has a *lot* on his mined - i sed I know he suffers from lots - thats why he has spots an we all laughd even Aitch wch was good - So that was bettr.

Thurs day 4 i mean 5

Bin tird with bad edache - Uncle Eriks worried i mite be sufferin from the Waiste. And the poyson. So ive had to stay in all weak an bin on a diet of *Understandings* (which is dull becus it meens i am stood under things witch is supposd to *ex-plain*) and *Pick-me-ups* (whch is fun becus uncl Alf lifts me up and swings me rownd) Uncl Erik sed it needs luv to maik the econ-o-me swing. Aitch at leest is tryin not to sulk. I do wish hed talk. Uncle alf sais the trubble is im still too young to chews. This is what is aitchs moods. But the good news is im stabl. i sed does that meen I get a horse? everyone laughd but eric said it meens im not gettin any younger - welcum to the club sed Alf an we all laughd.

Fri the six day

I am thinking of righting a storey - i startd thinkin it out on the mound this morning - its goin to begin like this -*Emma Edwards lived not quite on her own with her baby called Harry and a called Bone*. Uncle Eric showd me how to rite it right but if i do right storeys i suppose i will have learn spellings. I mean to learn spellings.

Im tired now so here ends

THE SECOND PAGE OF MY DAIRY EE

from my privat diary - the third page

Sunday 8 day Eric says my spellings gettin better - altho its still a bit unpredictabable. Been gettin along with my store-i - but im not puttin it down in righting because its even more privat than this diari. Aitch has bin happier - he says hed been thrown into his ado-less-sense (im not shure what that meens) but feels stronger now. I feel better too and alf says me and Aitch can go for an aventure tomorrow - Im lookin forward - we're not goin to keep goin round in circkles. Aitch thinks we ought to make maps - sounds a bit borein but at leest well be takin directions. See you soon.

Mon. 9th day morning felt very hot and flushd early on but alf says as its normal for a girl my age - the critics will make out you have nobody but you know better dont you , he sed. I askd was i thirteen agen and he. says neerly - I wanderd what was wrong with these *critiks* an alf says they leed people astray and Uncle Eric told me they are ignorant, like econo-mists. Alf and Eric can sumtimes sound very like each other altho theyre diff-erent. That must be because theyre brothers and like each other.

Guess what, I found some old diaries, just like you (im pretending im talking to my diary!) - and they were mine - but I dont remember.

Aitch and me are going out soon - we are goin to the heeth beyond The Crossin - Eric said we're old enough to go on our own now - Alf also told me a secret about spellin - he sed that altho there was a proper way when youve learnt it you have to make your own decisions, your own stand. He said not to say this to Eric because he has feelins an could be hurt like any one els.

Must take Wendy this afternoon.

**im goin to start a fresh page for this
afternoon as im sure its goin to be**

A BIG BIG AVENTURE EE

what happend on the afternoon

**Tues 10th day
morning**

Sortie I didnt come back yesterday - I was much too tired after everything - What a strange day it turned out - I cant put it right in words but hear goes - before we started out our uncles stood us aside for a PREP-talk - which is an intellectually all big cousin of a PEP. They said that when we go *outside* on our own we might meet things which we'd make us CHEWS (im so hot and bothered i keep losing my spelling) but that when that happened there were rules (like NOT TAKE-ING THINGS BY FORCE) which we mustnt lose or things could happen to us like poor Wendy. Thats like happened *to* her. (im getting confused)

Anyway, all this happened and then we got our things together -map, paper, pens, foods, torch-es and the like and Wendy -and our uncles said some-thing CONTRA-diction-airy - they set you on your own now - dont forget, well be always with you -It made me confused which is often happening but Aitch smiled so I thought - well *he knows* - an off we went.

Anyhow - gosh this write-ins so long its making me breathless

- anyhow we went on past The Crossing - it looked wider than last time we saw it - and climbed the mound that looks down on the heath. Thats when we met the first one. Aitch was showing me how to take directions when this very thin man appeared - I think he came out of The Crossing.

He looked very cross and was complaining to himself about this Ghost Machine. He said it looked nothing like the one he knew -all the parts were in the wrong places or all together different and how could they expect him to edit it when he saw us and stopped.

MERGER WARNING * MERGER WARNING * MERGER WARNING

Ghost Machine Management Services warn readers of a nervous or sensitive disposition that an identity merger is imminent.

Any reader liable to lose personality or unexpected blendings reads on entirely at their own risk. **END WARNING**

what happend on the afternoon (still)

He startd shoutin that we were ragga-muff ins an not supposd to be here and Wendy began to bark - he pulld out a littl white plastick bottl an showd it to Wendy an she whind and wimperd on the ground - he lookd at us again an smild - a crookd sickly smile. Kirwen Channing-Cheetah - he sed - newly appointted Edit-*or* of The Ghost Machine. Aitch stared back at him an seemed to look older than befor - Who do you work for? he sed. Edit-*or* acted nervus an sed - well naturally my services are negotiable - The Author or The Company sed Aitch - I really think its none of your business sed Edit-*or* an pleading an urgint meetin vanished from the page.

I sed i didnt think I liked this Edit-*or* an do you think hell be botherin us agen? Aitch sed he didnt think wed sin the last of him but not to worry becos we were *both* gettin strong - I know I said - and thats when the *second one* appeerd.

Second one was very peck-u-liar. He was talkin to himself too - i wander do they all do that round here? - only in all different voices and his face kept changin but even if the voices was womans his faces was always mans (thinkin of him makes me lose my subject) All the mens were old and sum lookd from a long time gone - Aitch says he saw one womans face for a second but Secondone didnt seem to like wearing her. An the vices - they argyouded with each other, made up storeys about the bad things other peopl had done, they beggd an maid out they lovd one another, pointed the very serious failings of family an friends and what it all added up to I dont know.

To MS EE - please be notified that I am taking legal advice about your remarks and what's more *I* don't consider your spelling improved.

from, a credit to his community,

a paragon of humanity

THE SECOND ONE

what happened on the afternoon – the rest

Second-one was tall and skinny and coughed a lot becoss he was forever smokin - I hate smoke I remembr -a n we seemd to lose all time watch in him. I wonderd why he hadnt seen us when he seizd up mid-face and with long hair and a beard on one side an cleen shaven with short grey hair on the other demanded – Come out. I heard you watching me – I didn’t like that as I had only *thought* not spoke an peopl shuddnt put their noses in your head. Aitch said – he must have terrible eyesight – we’re straight ahead of him. Second-one put his hands over his ears and cried – Stop shouting, it hurts.

Aitch an I lookd puzzled. Now this was when Wendy barked again. Second-one lost all his faces – they fell on the ground like a toppled stack of trays – an we saw I think his real one – which was very plain an ordinary. He screamed something incomprehensce-abbable about dee-tees an ran off to The Crossing.

Scraps of paper that stuffd his pockets fell from him – I picd sum up – what do they sed aitch – they say that that was The Author I sed. Aitch look troubled an almost affrayed.

When we came back, with our first maps done, our uncles had left The House Within The Mound. A note on the wall said – well be always with you. I cried for a while but was too tird, we all were, an so went to bed. I remember Aitch sais – I think to-morrow will be the day we chewse.

Phew!

time for a fresh page – EE

P.S. you can tell that second one from me – PHOEY.

FORMAL AUTHORIAL INTRUSION

Dear, beloved readers,

may I protest at recent tendencies in these pages and, in particular, cherished followers of this book, allow me leave and grant me your valued patience, so that I may refute the following:

- a) since the demise of The Head Of State public opinion and private irreverence in this Ghost Machine has begun to focus on me as a negative figure in his stead.
- b) doubts have raised, by the Wrathbone brothers and the naive eye of EE, as to my love for my creations and my adequacy for my task

I must insist that (a) I am not prone to despotic tendencies and have a doctor's certificate to prove it and that if this levity persists I shall be **forced** - for my own protection - to create something even more unlovable than the mortally retired Head Of State (I have plans for Economicus) and that (b) I love my creations equally and am not dictated to by the ghosts of deceased and former Authors nor am I subject to schizophrenic or alcohol-induced hallucinations. Since childhood I have been blessed with a vivid imagination and anyway if I can hear voices so can you! EE is a stupid girl and if she doesn't stop teasing me I'm going to have a word with her brother about her - so there.

Yours,

Carried away in the last sentence

The Author,

c/o The Institute.

EDITOR'S NOTE

(Apologies to readers for the temporary breakdown of Our Author. Please be assured that all lexical remedies are being applied and that our psychiatric technicians are working on the fault and that normal service will be resumed as soon as possible.

I hasten to add that the remarks by The Author about public opinion in these pages seem hardly warranted and that readers are advised to disregard the comments. I can only assume them to be symptoms of nervous paranoia, brought on, no doubt, by the excitability of imaginative labour.

If I may add a personal note of concern, however, I am troubled by recent events of a linear nature, suggestive as they are of character development in a Ghost Machine. This runs counter to The Authors's declared philosophy of the individual and his doubting analysis of the classical vision of a stable, core persona. I am especially worried about the role of HH and his mother, a charming girl in whom I have a considerable personal interest, readers will of course take her portrayal of me as no more than the amusing juvenile skit that it is — ha ha! Both are exhibiting alarming hints of future forward development. I am, therefore, in Our Author's temporary absence, installing a scheme of narrative disruption.

Kirwen Channing-Cheetah, newly appointed Editor of The Ghost Machine.)

SPACE FOR NARRATIVE DISRUPTION

GHOST MACHINISTS OF THE WORLD UNITE. YOU HAVE NOTHING TO LOSE BUT YOUR EDITORS - HH.

GHOST MACHINE MANAGEMENT SERVICES APOLOGIZE FOR THESE DISRUPTIONS. AN EDITORIAL CONTROL SQUAD IS BEING DESPATCHED TO THE AUTHOR'S HOUSE AND WE SHALL BE HAVING A WORD WITH YOUNG AITCH.

A NARRATIVE RESTORED

Tues 10th day evening

It is as though re-visiting a distant past that I return to this diary. I look back over these pages and see the mind of a child in the body of a budding woman. Although that was but this morning it seems another world. I know all now – I remember. To resume my account: my ‘brother’ and I resolved to set out for The Crossing believing that there would be the most likely place for *our time to choose*. Poor Wendy followed on along with us - I can see her now - tail wagging, sniffing in vain in the almost vegetation, running about in her brute innocence.

When we reached The Crossing it had changed. Not only was it still larger but voices threatened and zigzag illuminations scribbled across its black interior. Its voices were high and their shrieking pronouncements fragmentary and disjointed. In my naive way, I asked ‘young aitch’ if they were ghosts in a ghost machine. He told me not to worry but he didn’t know the answer yet. My poor brave boy. It was then that we saw The Author’s Head.

It was inflated to a gross mass, looming within the entirety of The Crossing. Yet it seemed somehow insubstantial, almost as if in outline. As before, the face changed constantly, while its speech was too rapid and convulsive to follow, composed of babbling babels of clashing accents and tones.

Wendy growled and then barked and the poor creature ran at The Author’s Head. What followed was horrible. As she entered The Crossing a terrible ear-splitting howl contorted The Author’s face and he, or it, began to tear at Wendy with his teeth. She started to split in two - from her side was born the upper body of WPC Grimbold who screamed and raved about young female gymnasts and the proper appliance of the truncheon - while poor Wendy whined and howled in her pain. The ending was mercifully short. Streams of white fluid instead of saliva poured from The Author’s mouth and both Wendy and the crazed WPC faded from existence.

A NARRATIVE CONTINUED

I sobbed and Aitch comforted me . I could feel his arms trembling too . I whispered that I wished our uncles were with us and it was then that, unfurling like a banner, a bright blazing phrase lit up the dark chasm of The Crossing.

‘Well be always with you’ it called. Aitch turned and gazed at it in silence then, taking my hand, told me his time to choose was here. He said I mustn’t be afraid but he had to make The Crossing and I wasn’t yet strong enough to follow. He had known since a dream on Saturday night that he had to meet the author - he named it without capitals - or even challenge him on his own ground, otherwise we would never be free of this permanent revolution, these endless cycles of repetitious change.

I begged him - No, look what happened to Wendy - but felt obscurely pleased that he no longer talked to me as though I were a child. He shook his head and said he had no fear as he had always been one entity and wouldn’t split like Wendy. I cried that I wouldn’t be able to manage on my own. You will, he said, you will.

Assuring me that however long he would be on the other side he would be back here in no more than a few hours, and hugging his sister for a last time, my son walked on into The Crossing. As he entered he slowly shrank, not with the distance but with age, growing younger with each step.

I realized what his fate would be and, my fear overcoming my fear, ran towards the dark maw to his aid. He heard my steps and, turning, shouted - No - and from then on began to grow. The Author’s face wrinkled and frowned and then vanished and, as he disappeared into the enfolding gloom, my boy turned back and waved.

I leant against a leaning tree. Waited. Prayed. Then mist began to rise, filling the mouth of The Crossing and, as I coughed on its fumes, I was forced back to The House Within The Mound.

I am alone now and I have grown . Eleven hours have gone and Aitch has not returned. My choice has been made. This night I must rescue my son.

Emma Edwards

HER STORY – 1

She went out through the door of shadow into the unwalked enclosure of the Waste Land night. The blackness was as thick as tar. Torchlight survived but a yard then drowned. On all sides unfamiliar dialects babbled from unclassified beasts. The unpopulated landscape of day thronged with the unacknowledged inhabitants of its night. Something rustled ahead. She felt fear drain the motion from her stride. It came forward.

“Rah-tew”, it cooed, “Rah-tee”. Yellow-beak entered the beam. Her fear ran away into the shades. Yellow-beak turned and rose out of the torchlight and its plumes glowed as if made luminous by bathing in light. Green and blue marked her way ahead.

Whispers circled around, she went forward, shrieks threw themselves at her, she moved on, despairing sobbing pulled at her sleeves, she pressed ahead. A tall man, preening a recent moustache, walked up the path towards her: “Kirwen Channing-Cheetah”, he announced with pleasure, “As your *Edit-or*, I felt it necessary to detain you from this cause, I mean course. Look, now there’s a good little girl, why don’t you come back with me to my office, it’s much nicer there, a much better area, and we can have tea and afterwards play *some games*, eh? ”, she finished, her voice growing in anger.

She looked at *Edit-or* with contempt and almost pity. His eyesight’s hopeless too, she thought, he can’t see me as I am. “I am a woman, you superannuated lecher, not a little girl anymore”, she answered, “ and I’m not going back anywhere – not to a house from a fairy story and definitely not to your office. Why didn’t you come straight out with it and ask me if I was doing *business*, eh? What about that then?”, she finished, her voice growing in anger.

“Now look here”, said *Edit – or*, growing taller and thinner as he spoke, “You’re just a fiction, a made-up character, and you’ll do as I tell you”. He stretched leaner and taller as annoyance pulled at self-importance till he was no thicker than a rope. Yellow-beak scissored down with its beak, cutting the rope in two. A scream stabbed at the night and the twin editorial twines collapsed and then like snakes uncoiled and slid off into the obscure.

Emma sighed within herself and went on, past the mounds and leaning oaks until they came to The Crossing. A silvery mist swirled within it, casting its faint light on the plain like a nebulous dome. She thanked the bird in her mind and lost definition in the mist, listening for a child.

HIS STORY - ONE VERSION

Tired, said the author, and looked down at his *open quite empty hands*. A yellow-beaked bird eyed him without interest on the table. It's not like it used to be - it was better writing poems, complained our former poet.

Yellow-beak pointed forward. It begins with poems, it said, all the stories start with *waves* and *particles* of rhythm. In the first days there were poems. You make poems sound like nursery rhymes, the defender of verse declared. 'Ding dong bell' - returned yellow-beak - Sprung rhythm equals high poetic culture. Sophomore, snapped poet.

Yellow-beak's black-button eyes watched without emotion as the twin halves of poet struggled to re-unite on the floor. OK, gasped the author, breathless, returning to his feet, You win -poetry can't take the tension, it can't carry its own strain. But what about this? - he continued - waving his arms at the grimy room - It's drab, it's dull, I can't stand it.

Beginning with nursery rhymes and fairy stories, the bird recited, *human* life progresses to awareness of self and others through the development of sympathetic imagination. For this we need, not the high-tension flashes of lyric verse, its *detonations*, not the audio-visual storms of celluloid, not the mindless intelligence of music, but the quiet persistence of prose.

Thanks for the sermon, said man to bird. It's too much like work, he moaned. The laws of thermodynamics, hummed the bird. Exactly, I hate them, protested the anti-physicist. Become a fifth-columnist, you'll like it, suggested black-button eyes.

Oh I *like* that - become a *traitor* - what a career move, sneered the loyal scribe.

OK then - call yourself The Resistance, chirped the bird.

I'll think about it, our hero conceded.

You'll go on? asked the feathered comforter.

All right, I said, but later, I *am* tired.

The bird disappeared from print without a word and I sat in my room alone.

But why tell stories, I asked the bird in my mind.

Because of the terrible fact, it replied.

HIS STORY – ANOTHER VERSION

My turn now, asserted HH and so found himself enwrapped in a silver mist. The only way out is forward, he told himself, and walked on, hoping he was keeping direction. The mist moved about him, examining, probing him with gentle curiosity. I haven't seen you before, it seemed to say. Or was it – just like all the others, they're all the same these toys - ? Perhaps with indifference, perhaps with acceptance, the mist retreated and cleared.

He was in a dingy street in a poor quarter of town. It was night. Glass from car windows decorated the kerb. From some houses music beat its defiant drums. From others he met the blank stare of boarded windows. He moved up the street to a little square. Yellow-beak hovered before a red door. 5, Hangover Square, HH sub-voiced.

He went to the door and knocked. Nobody came. The curtains were drawn but there was light within. He tapped on the window. Nobody came. The bird pushed at the door with its beak. It creaked.

HH pushed the door open and entered a dark passage where his hands found a heavy doorknob. It turned and, bathed in light, he looked upon a lean man with tired eyes scribbling on a page.

The man glanced up then dropped his pen. "You – you", he stuttered, "You're not allowed in here – get *out*". HH shook his head. The man grew angry and ran towards his fiction. His grasping arms went through HH like air. "No violence, please", remonstrated character to author, "We need to talk".

The Author blew out his cheeks and sat down. He lit a cigarette. "OK – what do you want – a happy ending?", said the writer, sneering an emphasis on his last words. "H'm, is that it? A nice home, a good job, lovely wife and kids, all that crap?" the scribe prodded on at HH.

Who studied His Author. He noticed how ill-fed He looked, how poor His furnishings, how worn His attire.

"Is your health OK?" HH unintentionally thought aloud.

"Thanks for *asking*", answered The Author with feigned pleasure. "I'm fine – I always am. I get by. Now if that's all you wanted will you go away and leave me be – I've a book to write you know."

HH did not move. With patience he composed his thoughts and spoke:

ANOTHER VERSION TWO

“I came here to end cycles. I knew that the only way to that was to go *outside* The Book and meet You. My friend and tutor, Eric Wrathbone, had studied Your Psychology and believed that the reason for our troubles lay in Your Own Anxieties and that our liberation depended on gaining Your Trust. Believe me, I am no threat. I come here openly and place myself at Your Mercy. I address You as God but would speak to You as Man. You have given us life but no purpose – You have bequeathed to us Your Loneliness.”

“Very moving, but scant theology” the Divine Being curtly opined. “However”, He continued, inflating His bony chest, “As your Author I acknowledge a certain responsibility and am touched by your dependence on Me and am kindly disposed to your limited understanding. I shall look into this matter and inform you awhile.”

HH shook his haed – it wasn’t enough.

“What, wasn’t I grandiose enough?” the Author queried, pausing to scribble on scrap-paper. “What are you writing?” asked HH. “Future developments – a note”, his scribe confided. “That’s what I want”, the character pleaded, “future development – for all.”

“Well you can’t have it”, the Author barked.

“Why not – You can do anything – You’re God.” The writer laughed quietly at this. He looked his creation in the eyes.

“No, I’m not God”, he smiled. “What are you then?” “Well I’m a covert realist, if that helps.” “SO WHO IS GOD?”

The Author backed away at this, whispering to HH not to say things like that, you never knew who might be listening. HH stared at him.

“You’re mad”, the young man said.

“No, I’m not, it’s just that about what you said, “ he whispered again, “you see, I’m not allowed to say.” He looked nervously over his shoulder.

“Why?”, pleaded the boy.

The Author’s Head returned. He wore a long white beard and flowing locks.

“HAST THOU CONSIDERED MY SERVANT BONE?”, he boomed, “WHY IS IT THAT HE IS STILL BOUND?”

As the room shook to the tremendous sound a correction-fluid fountain gushed up beneath The Author and he faded away giggling. “Bye-bye”, squeaked a falsetto. The room, the street, everything faded.

HH stood in his abandonment, stranded alone at the bottom of a page.

from the diery of emma edwards (aged 8)

Dear Diery, today i had a reel aventure - My Moms freind Alis had sed sheed sin a fare was goin to be on at the park an so my mum tolled my dad we shud go - I dont no why but my dad getts grumpy sumtimes when my mom tells him things but he sed he supposd so an we cud go on Tewsdai niht -Mom sed thats saynt Nogs niht becos shee is yen relijuss an my dad sed so, who the devull was saynt Nog - my mum sed no-thing so I spose that was that.

Anyway - that was yesterday and this is today - tewsdai i meen - an sumthink reely ex-siting happend at the fare - Id had a go on the bigg weal an the water-shoot an the cocoa nutt shy an whil my mom an dad wer argyouin bout sum-think to doo with the Farther i went rownd back behind the bigg tent to see what was ther.

Ther was this littl booth, all aloan, wither I meen with a faydead sign sayin Yur Futur Sin. I steppd in. An gess what - ther was this man with no fais, juss ears - he was tied to a woodun chair but his bands wer free an in his left i think he held a shineye miroar an he poynted it at me!

So gess what, diery, in the miroar was this littl boy - standin all aloan in a plais that was all wiht - then i saw this woman an *she was mee* but she was oldare of corse - then i saw the boy agen onlie he wasnt like a littl boy anymore he was like a babeye - he was gettin littlare - I dont no why butt i fought hes goin to disapeer altogethr an so i shoutd to the woman for the boy - an shee herd mee - she leent down an put her hand thru in too the wiht plais an up she pickd the boy to her breest.

Then she lookd owt at me an sed I remembr now.

An then it went cold an it was rainin an the booth had gon an i was standin on my owen am mee mom cum up to mee cross becos Weave Bean Lookin Every-Wher For You . I tolled her abowt the booth but she smackt mee for lie-in.

So your the one-lie one to no this, diery.

Emma Edwards her own words

THEIR STORY

The baby boy did not know it was he as it lay abandoned on the white page in the whiteness without words. There was no-one else but it and it was not anyone.

Then the whiteout parted like a cloud and above and below began. A hand came out of the cloud and the baby pressed a thumb to forefinger and a face followed on a lowering arm and something rose on the face like a sun - a smile. The baby smiled like a mirror and a name fell on the baby and wrapped it against the snowy page - MABABEE - it called.

Mababee gurgled and the hand reached to it and mababee laughed as something tickled it with touch. The huge and gentle hand lifted the tiny mababee to the parting like a cloud and then the world regathered its form and instead of on a blank page mababee rested in its mother's arms, human in scale and bound for the measurable, ordinary world.

Emma Edwards held her Harry as she moved through the silvery mist looking for the mouth of the Crossing. In the undefined distance a girl's voice chanted its indistinct patter. The rhyming jingle skipped closer. Emma felt something pull her. She remembered now. She could no more resist it than argue with gravity. She discovered herself nowhere, falling through nothingness to another time, another resurrection of place. She gripped Harry to her breast. Then the chant became clear. It told her:

“Emma Edwards lived not quite on her own with her baby called Harry and a dog called Bone.”

HER STORY – 2

Emma Edwards lived not quite on her own with her baby called Harry and a dog called Bone. She had a friend named Penny and, once a week, her mother would phone. She lived on what was called Social Security, which wasn't very social and made her insecure. She once had a boyfriend, Aitch, but he hadn't been to see her now for more than a year. She often felt tired because Harry often cried but when she felt that Bone would come and wag his tail and play *let's pretend* – lying down dead or begging with paws and that made amends. She kept a diary of her thoughts and wrote poems of sorts. Her diary she marked 'private' and kept it closed to others eyes and put in poems at the foot of a long day's page. This was how things were and she thought they'd never change when one December's day

....

- **NO!**
- What the fu The bent scribe said as refusal hit him on the back of his head. Hunched above a borrowed word-processor, still struck by the blow, he turned (50%) and swayed (50%) to find EE (aged 23) standing in persona perfect at his side (100%). She had a thick hardback in her hand.
- You are not taking my story. It's mine, it's private (very) and it's not for twisting, twisted mind. –
- You've been talking to those Wrathbone buggers. – twisted-mind said, still rubbing his head.
- I've a mind of my own, thanks. –
- No, you haven't. Your mind is mine. I am your author, your sole creator, your ultimate reality. Everything is decided by me. –
- So why call the book autonomous? You can't stop that. –
- God, I hate autodidacts. – he paused – tears (of rage) brimmed in her eyes. – Now look *luv* –
- Don't you *luv* me, you patronising git. You're trying to turn me back again, into a woman's body with a child's mind – that's how you see me, you *shit*, that's what you make of me, *sod it*, you made me chime again then – I can't stand this jingle jangle – aagh! –

She screeched and aimed the book at the author's head. Ducking, he observed just how like his former wife she looked.

HER STORY TOO

- This whole episode is bloody pointless - she cried in frustration -and by the way: you *stink*. -

Embarrassed, our scriptorial gladiator pleaded the onerous and all-absorbing nature of his task. The imagination takes over everything. There weren't enough hours in the day. You can't put a quart in a pint-pot.

- *Take three quarts of paradox from your nearest pint-pot* - she quoted, with unliterary relish - Remember? -

- Alright, alright, I'll cook something up for you, OK? Just stop prodding me, I'm really rather sensitive, y'know. Even writers have feelings. - crumbled the erstwhile Resistance. He told her he needed something from another room. He closed the door behind him and, quickly, turned a key. He went outside and peered through a chink in the curtains at his own room, his own creation. She trusted him for a moment then, uneasy, tried the door. As her back was turned and the door refused her, the furnishings faded from the shabby room. She felt an icy draught on her neck and turned back to emptiness. A single sheet of paper floated down towards the floor. She reached for the paper and read: *Emma Edwards lived not quite on her own with her baby called Harry and dog called Bone*. Screaming, she faded into print on a page. Her scream echoed on in the empty room. Leaning to the window like a voyeur, author savoured the quality of the scream. More rage, he thought, than fear. I'll have to watch out for her. The white sheet folded up and reformed itself into a yellow-beaked bird. It continued the recital of Emma's story. It came to *how things were* and *one December day* and said:

- when one December day she went to walk in the park with her baby and Bone. On the path ahead was a scrap of white paper. She picked it up and read: *well be always with you*. Her sorrow lifted under the leaden sky and a short, moustachioed man with a Lancastrian accent came up to her and said: *As I like plain speaking and speaking plain, I'm here to lift thee out this clap-trap trap*. So saying, he beckoned, and Emma, her baby and Bone, all followed Red Alf through an evergreen thicket. Shouting and panting, a lean man ran in vain far behind. The author stopped, breathless he lost them, then the evergreens browned and died, the grass withered into almost vegetation and its author was left stranded alone in the desolation of his imagination.

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OF THE FIRST CAUSE

Author of authors reclined on His bed in the clouds. Critically, He hummed to the broadcasts of distant galaxies. Interestingly, considered His appraisal, but not quite Virgo super-cluster. Yellow-beak, His messenger, came up from the earth. What language today, Your Magnitude? - enquired the heavenly bird. Sanskrit, Hebrew, Pali, Tibeta No, no, intoned the Divine Source, Let Us use English. English, Your Circumambulance? - queried the feathered thinker, isn't that a little *mercantile*? I need to talk of a mundane being, confided the Scriptor Supreme.

Author of authors offered His opinion on The Ghost Machine its author. Hardly consistent, complained The Word, a benefactor here a despot there, subversive on the one hand (left) oppressor of innocents on the other (right). He gives his creatures liberty then denies them choice and dares to invoke *himself* in comparison with *Me* whilst seeming neither likeable nor to know Icelandic. Unlike Myself. Who Am The Nicest Possible You Could Hope To. And know Icelandic - *Fyrir ofriki Haralds konung* (e.g.). What did Yellow-beak opine?

Hosannahs filled the heavenly vault. Hordes of seraphic critics fired cannonades of destructive analysis from cloud-lapped tow'rs, instantaneous libraries assembled themselves in annotation of the Holy Critique. Icelandic panegyrics sprang fully patterned from the pregnant earth and levitated towards infinity while effigies of the lesser author fell burning down to the black pits of Obscurity, the bitter lakes of Condemnation, the foul dungeons of Retribution.

Black-button eyes looked through the Divine Transparency. Ordered by the unfolding of disorder, the work begins then begins again through a progress of self-negation. Opposed to itself it drives itself forward, characteristics clash with the growth of character.

It stopped. It looked intently at the Supreme Fact of Fiction. Nothing, it rounded, is what it seems in The Ghost Machine.

Yes, I said, and dropped out of the clouds, landing unhurt on my knees on the barren ground of a previous page. Silent, expressionless, Yellow-beak watched from a window in mid-air.

**from THE GRIMM'S GARDENS
CHRONICLE**

There was great excitement yesterday evening in Much Biding as the historic market town where once King Edward the First, the Hammer of the Scots, wept for his dead bride the fair Edwina (*sic*, **Ed.**), welcomed a production of that ever-popular programme *Many Questions Any Answers* live from the Great (and horseshoe hung) Hall of the Wakeman's Gables. The event was chaired by Mr Roger Rogerson, a person of noted personal personality, while the celebrity panel was comprised of Honarius Honorium, acting co-ordinator of The Ghost Machine Board, who, it was hoped, would have much of interest to recount of his adventures whilst (so recently) lost in a waste-paper bin; Mr Dentigerous Alume-allotment, the controversial and red-bearded horticulturist and philumenist; the feminist and fashion editor, Ms Rosie Thingadawn; and, sensationally, making her first public appearance since her death, veiled in a discreet blank space, the late WPC Wendy Grimbold, newly appointed head of intelligence services.

Mr Rogerson opened the entertainment by remarking on the timeless and homely (so gently weighed with thatch) attraction of (to name it in full) Much Biding Little Consequence and reminded the audience that it was in this very hall, a little over a century ago, that this great institution (the programme) had first been performed, on the then technology of (he pronounced it with historical emphasis) ray-dee-oh. Without further ado, he introduced panellists to audience (as above) and audience to panellists (a muttered phrase with his back turned to the crowd). He then requested, nay, called upon, the First Questioner.

THE FIRST QUESTION

Mr Wilf Sly, of Little Biggin, asked if there was any truth in the much-touted rumour of the impending installation of a new Economic Drive in the Central Machinery. Speaking the mind of the Company, Honarious Honorium assured the audience that no such plan was in hand, that if there were such an intention the convention of an extra-ordinary general meeting would be required, that all the 12 principal shareholders would be away on holiday during August and that installation of such equipment would involve a considerable sum of external capital and a consequent reduction in public service power points in Company Booths, thereby greatly reducing that joy of every ghost-machinist, the national pastime, the use of do-it-yourself.

Ms Thingadawn, speaking metaphorically, veiled her thoughts in some remarkable comparisons, scintillating as the night's lights, and, dazzling the audience with the electric brilliance of her likenesses, concluded by insisting that every woman should have one. And a new day was to come.

Red-bearded Dentigerous took issue with that. And this. And something else again. It was time, he perorated, to light the fuse, and fill our gardens with red blooms. Like ignitions. It was time, he insisted, to burn away the dross, the excess, the animal fat, and re-charge the landscape with a crimson spring. It was time, he declared, for change.

WPC Grimbold was unavailable for comment, for reasons of security and a certain personal mortality.

The audience applauded with professional timing and enthusiasm and Mr Rogerson was pleased to have settled Mr Sly on that one.

QUESTIONABLE TOO

Despite some curious semi-audible interjections from Mr Sly, who was courteously ejected by welcoming machines, Roger Rogerson glided unperturbed, his teeth, invisible to the listener, gleaming, to the next question and questioner. Junius Oppchurch, of Little Wanting, had anxieties about Company Artistic Policy - were planning committees obtaining the maximum returns on indentured labour and was there a direction post post-modernism?

Excited, aroused, Ms Thingadawn displayed a sumptuous portfolio of imaginative transformations, all, she emphasised, like traditional handicrafts, produced remarkably cheaply in the poor quarters of Third World ghost machines, so liberating the choosing power of the home consumer and aiding less developed foreign spectres. She particularly recommended the rainbow coloured magic of Latin American ghost realities, where the vivid hues of tropical luxuriance were hewed to the drive of European machines. Dentigerous Alumelotment begged pardon both to differ and for his ignorance here, but, while he was no expert on modern art, for him art lay in nature, he did know there were limits to resources and surely the stockpiled museum pieces in Spare Part warehouses could be converted for use in new machines?

Honarius Honorium saw merit on both sides but was quietly insistent on the need for artistic rationalisation and narrative economies. The Board, he confided, was awaiting a report on Future Artistic Licensing. The urbane Roger Rogerson, remarking that he was aware of WPC Grimbold's sensitivities on the subject of future developments, excused her the question and smiled at the rising of marshalled applause.

BEYOND ANY QUESTION

For our final question, continued the stylish presenter, we have Mrs Agnus Deus of Whychmead. Mrs Deus, who is (I believe) chair of her local do-it-yourself society, has a question about the Ghost Machine in the garden. Here he smiled at the red-bearded horticulturist.

His smile was, for once, misplaced in its faith as, floating some seven feet above her seat, the pallid Mrs Deus explained that, as a result of a severe fatality with a temporal feedback, she had no practical use for her intended question and wanted to know instead whether or not there was a life after death. This, she added, would help her greatly in the matter of her own (questionable) existence. A deathly silence chilled the hall. Power-consumption on the ghost-grid soared in the rush for heat. Hastily, the presenter began to remind the audience that the time-honoured Metaphysical Policy did not allow such debates when the expunged Wendy Grimbold, hissing like an antique record, deepened to a further shade of emptiness, and, before the multitude, - *Personally speaking, no* - , blank space declared.

Confusion ran breathless among the crowd, paradox turned this way and that. Honarius Honorium, shouting above the heads of tumult, told how he (a former Company Chairman) had been forced to revise his (previous) sceptical materialism when he (torn to shreds by The Author) had experienced a (for him) religious experience and that we should all await Friar Economicus's forthcoming sermon, when, overcharged with latent meanings, the ghost-drive failed and the hall, the audience and the panel were submerged by the darkness and failure of power.

THE CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER'S REPORT

As the Board is aware, health problems among machinists are mounting and causing serious losses of production and efficiency in The Ghostly Fabric. I tender this brief diagnosis towards a remedy:

1. Excessive use of do-it-yourself has created serious dislocation and chronic alteration, especially among the under-40's. I recognise that the population cannot be deprived of their recreation and that continuing use of self-assembly is vital to economic growth so I propose we limit usage by amending the basic kit to a form that can only be powered up in official booths, rather than at home or in public as at present. Regulation of power supply could then effect control.

2. Linear leanings have produced over-crowding on the surface of The Book. Despite the effectiveness of the Central Cycles, pandemic forward bias, grounded in consciousness, is consuming space on an unacceptable scale. The resultant congestion is provoking serious psychological problems among the mass of machinists who cannot find pages on which to develop. I recommend that we institute a programme of perpendicularity, maximising efficiency of space and providing illusory room for seriously limited development.

3. Metaphysical anxiety and unbridled artistic tendencies have returned, in spite of the successes of vaccination. We now know these diseases react to inoculation by developing new and resistant strains, in accordance with the law of evolution, and we must accept that they cannot be wiped out entirely. I do not purpose the abandonment of preventative medicine but suggest we mount a takeover bid and, by becoming the chief player in the market, utilise these illnesses to our maximum profit.

THE CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER'S REPORT

4. The unpredictability of the Author's imagination. I need not, I know, spell out the effects of this plague to my colleagues as you are all personally acquainted with the havoc it sustains, but I do offer the following alternative plans:

a) *A Crusade Outside The Book.*

If, by effective propaganda, the masses were persuaded that their energies, when combined in focus, would be sufficient to enter the hostile environs of the outside world and conquer and colonise the unreliable scribe, the stimulus to economic growth would be immeasurable. The space programme required could become a source of national pride and unity and the scientific benefit of knowledge of the Outside would lead to rapid technological advance. This course would, perhaps, require co-operation with rival machines.

b) *Adaptation of Hopelessness as an Official Cult.*

If, on the other hand, we have to regard the scriptorial surprisingness as uncheckable, then I suggest we utilise our weakness and proclaim Lack Of Control and Utter Despair as desirable commodities — this could perhaps be linked to the Metaphysical Strategy — and profit thereby from the negative energies accrued. Dispensation Kiosks could be constructed and machinists would there exchange substance for supplies of Total Resignation and All-consuming Pessimism.

I respectfully conclude this summary.

Anonymous Anon,

**Physician in Chief
to the Board.**

THE AUTHOR'S STORY

I looked at the hazy window that hung in mid-air. I had seen enough of my imagination - an angry survey had shown me that, outside the dead evergreens and the withered park, all was bounded by The Waste and its purposeless mounds and blasted, leaning oaks. The town that had once breathed through the park had completely faded. There was the Crossing. But I wasn't ready to return home yet. I looked again at the window.

Yellow-beak turned and blended into it. I pulled myself up and, heaving, went through. I felt a rush of air and heard a loud pop: the aperture had vanished. There was nothing behind, nothing to the side, of where it wasn't anymore. I could go but forward. I trod down a grey slope. There was no sight of Yellow-beak. I came into a ghostly glade, thick-grown with colourless grass. A dried-up river-bed drowsed in its heart. The grass was unpleasant to tread, sticky with a wet transparent substance, an almost water, so I tested the river-bed — it was dry as desert sand, firm as bare rock. A faint mist rose to meet me, wisping about my ankles.

I followed the misty channel. A broken pram lay abandoned on its side. Then a mound of old tyres. I saw, I heard, no life anywhere. The detritus continued. This was a scrap-yard of the disappeared. The un-river, no longer somnolent, swayed in a sharp bend to the right and a figure of a familiarity that shocked walked ahead towards me — it was myself. I called to him, gestured - he said nothing. Without a glance, he walked on past me, his eyes void as if hypnotised. I shouted *You're me* but he went on. I backed away then ran, afraid. After a hundred yards I looked back: he who was me had changed direction and now followed. But stopped as I stopped. Neither said a word. So, myself following myself, some sixty yards apart, I moved on ahead.

Things worsened at every turn as another of me materialised, ignored its own self, walked past to then follow. Soon there were over twenty of them/us/me, all trailing within sixty yards, silent, spaced apart like marching men. I ceased to speak to my selves and trooped on at the head of my own column, through the continuing glade, with no company but myself and that no company at all.

IN HIS OWN WORDS

The landscape began to lift and change. We reached a rocky table and the arid course dived and narrowed and cut a ravine like a young stream. The dry mist thickened to my knees. More and more of me thrust into the confusion of pronouns, growing younger like the river and soon the nearest were but little boys, trailing a few yards behind. If I stopped, all stopped, I could go only forward, which led back. I tried the walls of the chasm, but its perfect new-born smoothness gave me no grip.

The incline steepened and, bruising my legs against the rubble of cookers, fridges, TV sets, old bicycles, prams, tyres and all the other junk of a so-called and absent civilization, my self-assembly toiled on. The walls sank into the ground and the prospect levelled into a mist patrolled morass of waterless mud, wet with the same unpleasant stickiness that coated the grass. I reached three or four years old and was nervous about the future, the past. I could see no way ahead.

I all stopped. I had no idea of what to do about food and drink, I was tired and I didn't like my company at all. I shouted at them and, angered by their dumb indifference, ran at the nearest and youngest. They moved the same distance back. I gave up, sat down and slept.

Waking, I looked at my watch - it had stopped. Nothing had changed - there was light but no sign of sun, the temperature was still mild and were silent. I wished that I 'd never come through that window, I blamed everyone, everything, my parents, my generation, my addiction to imagination, my neighbour's cat, my ex-wife, my best friend, my new shoes, my first love, the failure of Western Philosophy, my creel of unwashed laundry, the most distant molecule in existence and the Prime Mover of All. I hectored my impassive simulacra, I threatened the skies with revenge, I kicked at old fridges and swore. I squatted down by a child's cycle in despair.

A yellow-beak reached out of the empty air. Without head or body it spoke: "You have come to the source of your self. In order to progress, in order to survive, you must cross the swamp of beginnings, the morass of the first called, the terminus of origin."

At the last word, the yellow-beak faded. "Sophomore", I cried.

THE TRUTH PERHAPS?

Of course, naturally you could say, as a matter of undeniable fact, I went on forward. Or approximately so. The bog, knee to waist deep, pulled at my sense of direction. It gathered around on all sides. There were fewer doubles tailing me now and, as the swamp turned them, they lost line. I suppressed the thought of the youngest. The mist thickened and I was alone: a comet without tail. Then the language storm began.

Unrelated and pure, winds of vowels sheared across the flat land. Broken clusters of consonants struck me like hail. Rigid imperatives barked their unconnected commands. Verbs jostled me, nouns withered and died at my feet. Silvery adjectives threw their nets around me. Syntax shattered and broke before my face. New-born cries crawled helpless in the mud, suffocating almost at birth. I began to disappear: my arms faded ghostly as air, the word-streams whistled through me, I felt my name detach itself as all alphabets collapsed. I tried to call on anyone, no-one, anything, something or someone or nothing and a thin I fluted on the air. I felt my lungs empty and as the world imploded I glimpsed I thought a I felt I know a I touched I swear a I knew in faith that

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November had been mild but the damp had gathered in December, thick as the congestion on his lungs. He pulled his collar up in the biting night air and walked on through the back streets to his house. What did she use to call it? Ha, Hangover Square. He lit another one and choked for a moment then exhaled. He turned the corner to his home and noticed someone standing by his door. He peered, wrinkled his nose. She turned, seeing him, and as his steps neared in the yellow electric light he made out at last the woman at his door. He dragged hard on his cigarette and, breathing deep as a runner, opened the language and spoke. “Emma”, the author said.

FROM A FUTURE EDITION

a transcript of an interview with the late Hilarius Hilaricon

(An upper storey room in the offices of Grimm's Gardens News. The interviewer relaxes in a lounge chair. Seven feet above the floor, perhaps too close to an open window, looking like a white sheet seen side on in the air, floats the ghost of Hilarlus Hilaricon. The interview is already in progress.)

Int. - I'm sure the question every budding machinist would like to ask you is: what's it like being a ghost?

HH.-Very cold.

Int. - I see.

H.H.- After a decade or so one becomes partly *acclimatized*, but the memory of other times never fades. Unlike oneself.

Int. - You fade?

H.H. - All ghosts do. We are like variable stars.

Int. - Does this give discomfort?

H.H. - In the extreme. Imagine yourself being turned into water then poured down an open sink. That is what it is like.

Int. - So there's a great difference between life and death?

H.H. - The difference is one of frequency: living, we are often, temporarily, dead; dead, we are permanently so.

Int. - So life's not entirely pleasant after life?

(H.H. starts to rise higher and veers close to the window.)

H.H. - What life? It does give time for thought. And experiment. To make oneself manifest. Known. To focus on the material. To *lift things*, whee!

(Behind the interviewer's head, a pencil detaches itself from a desk and orbits an angled lamp.)

Int. - Lift things?

H.H. - Yes, that's how we learn. It took me perhaps a century to master the basics. To acquire the concentration.

Int. - Do you ever *haunt*?

H.H. - Memories haunt, not ghosts. It is they that call us. It was here, they say, it was then. It was him., it was her. Memories.

THE TALK GOES ON

Int. - You paint a rather bleak picture, are there any

H.H. - Joys? There is a certain knowledge - a time to watch. We see the generations rise and fall, we see the cycles turning through the years. And we can *lift* things.

(Another pencil rises from the desk and joins its twin in a perfect opposing orbit of the lamp.)

Int. - Is it, do you think, a *permanent* condition?

H.H. - Does death last? No-one knows. There are those who fade and never recur. But what their fate is, that is a page we cannot turn.

Int. - If I might pick-up on that image of a book, since The Ghost Machine closed, do you have any final opinions on The Author?

H.H. - I thought I knew him once. But most knowledge lies in imagined verity. I have studied His Work. Examined it with care. It is worm-eaten with lacunae. Its chronology is impossible to establish. The record it bequeaths is incomplete and conjectural as the re-constructions of prehistory. Its principal figures are riddled with inconsistencies, its minor characters evanescent as the hour. If He ever existed then His legacy is doubt: one can only conclude that the Work, the Universe as we have it is a fiction - authored by contradiction or self-negation. By an Author who is part of that fiction too. If, for example, we are all part of the Book, cogs in a Ghost Machine, having knowledge of that Book, how then can we act without foreknowledge. If the Book is already written, how can we have free-will? But yet we choose. And our choices are founded on our ignorance.

Int. - Could it be that our Book, The Book, is part of another, greater Work, that we cannot see, cannot read?

H.H. - It may be so.

Int. - Well, on another, lighter note, our younger machinists, I'm sure, would like to know if

H.H. - There are any more adventures to be had? Regions to explore? Undiscovered bournes within the living machine? It is relative to the individual. What is past to me is to come to others. It begins nowhere and ends nowhere, but in-between goes forward.

Int. - Hilarius Hilaricon, thank you for this interview.

(The ghost dissipates through the bright-lit window. The pencils dance around their dark sun, like parts in a pointless machine.)

GHOST MACHINE REPAIR KIT

I

FINDING THE MATERIAL

Take image of fossil from a previous page. Research corroborative data. With the relevant geology to hand, and a weekend naturalist's hammer signed *Bates, in mimicry* or *Wallace, in spirit*, and with a thick twine of likening, bind the blackened petrification to the whites of another's cranium. (It need not be a friend's but it must be human) Soak cranium/fossil for one dark winter in a thick metaphorical sauce, season with insult and affliction, stew in your own juice for seven days then rinse well and discard head. (If still in use return to owner) Do not leave it out on open, public view.

II

PREPARING THE MATERIAL

Dig hole in back garden (it must be your own) removing any unwanted neo-Georgians or redundant cohorts of gnomes. Insert fossil in hole and sprinkle with dried oak leaves and a little, necessary affection. Mentally adjust your television and announce to anyone concerned/unconcerned the surprise birth of a baby/sudden end of history/ unexpected inheritance from *Uncle Oz* (whichever option preferred). Throw television from first storey window, tread down mixture and top with a layer of warm, sticky cement. Remember to draw your curtains. Say goodbye to neighbours and leave the subject to marinate for four seasons. Never let your dog in the garden.

III

TESTING THE MATERIAL

Having pacified dog, dig up mixture from hole. Admire withered flowers and dead shrubs. Keeping your nose covered, *atishoo*, take mixture indoors. Apologise to family for methane. Holding at a precise angle, never more, never less, place material in oven. Turn to gas mark 4 / 220°C or 425°F and thank them politely, then switch on oven and run. Remember to advise family. If oven does not catch fire and explode within three days, the material is safe to use.

IV

FIXING THE MATERIAL

Take care of unwarranted metaphysics. Apply former fossil to damaged parts with a moist spatula. Press pages together and hold firmly for a timeless moment. With infinity to hand and prior to the ultimate conclusion, run bath and immerse in lukewarm water. Leave to soak for another chapter. Beware of artful comparisons. Avoid insidious adverbs and loose, available adjectives. When material stands up and proves it can talk, lead out into the gathered assembly.

INSIDE

I mean there I am - still shiverin - it was cold yknow - there I am an all she wants to do is give me a lecture on literary criticism - I didnt like that last page she says - it was too like what you did before - repeatin yourself she says - Repeatin myself - ha - shes tellin me - thanks for the critique Em I says - your welcome she says - Welcome - ha - so then she starts examinin the room - I know its a bit of a mess but what the - I dunno - I mean - how can I be expected - too much to do - I see things havent changed for the better here she tells me - its my work I said - my work - want to be careful she tells me - watch you dont get caught up in that ghost machine - I can look after myself - Really she asks - lookin as if she didnt know that - so why have you come here - I thought it was time to get some sense out of her - for once I thought - To *see* you she purrs - little girl act I thought - an I says - ok so now youve seen me - So why have you come - I dont know - she says - I just wanted to see how you *were* - How I am I tells her - Im not in the past tense - Well not for yourself she laughs - so I got out of the way of that and asks her again why come here - that got up her nose - Why do you want me to explain she goes - Because I need to know - I stands firm - and then she goes again - Well Im not tellin you - I hate *explainins* - Im not some character in your bloody book - she says - thats what you think I thought - Ive a mind of my own - she claims - Remember - not that Ive noticed I thought - then I changes tack an asks hows Harry - ok she says an hes at her moms tonight for once shes lookin after him an what a favour her mom thinks shes doin an then the story of her shoppin an what the neighbours are doin or sayin or what she thinks theyre sayin an God I think she aint half tedious an she really can sound paranoid when then she says Why did you ask about Harry its not as if hes yours - Just bein polite - I says - an anyway has she heard from his father - that was a real mistake to make - so I gets chapter an verse about his stupid antics an his pain in the arse of a family - no wonder we split up I thought an I was just right then when I spots this bite - on her neck - I mean it could have been a blemish but she never had one there an I know her skins unusual but it wasnt it was a bite an I knew then what I already knew that shed been seein others an it wasnt that I didnt know but it was seein there before me an I cant get the memory out of my head an I wished we hadnt split an I remembered I mean it all came back I mean it was us together I mean - Yes - No - I mean there I am - Alone.

And her stood before me in my home.

THE BUS, THE DIARY AND THE CHILD

Emma snivelled as she sat down near the back. She often cried at home but never before in public. Not since a child. *Are you all right luv?*, a woman opposite tendered. *Yes*, she told her, *I've just a cold*, she lied. The woman withdrew, looking like everybody's mother, and Emma sat back in her seat, her thoughts, as the bus droned. What made him say, how could he have done To have read her diary, her own private Did he think she belonged to him? She was never his, or only for a time. A short time. 'What did he think I was - his wife? No, sir, not me. Nor anyone else for that matter. As a matter of fact. He doesn't like facts, not him. It's all just words with him. Telling people about when he was married when he'd been single all his life. I know about him. *All* about him. Now that he's given his little game away. My diary. The nerve. Prying into my privacy like he was some sort of God. A miserable little deity he'd make. Making me out like I was a child. I'm a parent of one - which is more than he'll ever be. My diary, my own I was *ill* then. That's the only reason I went with him. I wasn't well. That was why I couldn't spell. But it's not like that anymore, no siree, I have my own life now, you bet, I'm the one in the driving seat, I'm going forward now and I'm not looking back. Not at him.'

The bus pulled up at her stop. Emma alighted, thanking her driver in the local fashion, and walked on, turning left up Shearing Street then right onto Jenson Drive. She pushed the bell at her mother's - number 37. Her brother let her in where a sulking four-year old was waiting for her eyes. What's he done now, she thought, and, this is what real life's all about, not him and his words. He knows nothing, he's a child. Worse than a child. *What have I told you?* - she set to work on Harry.

CONTRA -FICTION

The Book is finished and The Book goes on. It existed before it was written, waiting for its time. The first author was its medium, his life its living page. He found it in the darkness, he found it in his mind. It was Outside and non-existent but moved behind his eyes. Without his hand it could not be but once it was it moved at its own commands.

Yellow-beak paused from its high-pitched chant. Do you like that? it asked, earnestly, querulously.

The author stroked his half-shaven chin - Maybe, maybe. It'll mean another visitation from Hilaricon.

Hilarius, the bird intervened. I wasn't trying to be funny, its scribe protested. His name, defended Yellow-beak, His full name.

Pedant, muttered scriptor. He was uneasy, he said, about the contradictions, take the interview with the ghost, the logic's full of holes - he calls death permanent then talks of fading spectres, they acknowledge The Book is closed then create another page.

Contradiction is the fact of fiction, the bird maintained.

The writer looked about his poor kingdom, his book crammed, paper-strewn little room, his ill-comforting domain. What about the punctuation, he spoke out to the air.

Punctuation varies between episodes to sidestep authority and functions as a metonym for creative liberty, quoted and jingled the feathered theorist.

It leaves me open to attack, his maker complained.

The bird told its author something secret. Then something else again. I see, but there's still the contradictions, a thoughtful writer pondered.

Yellow-beak faded on the slow moving air, its ghostly outline lingering in the mid-morning sun. I breathed deeply, tasting the moment, my solitude, my life.

Then the beak re-appeared. It told another story.

What? - I cried - How old?

The bird regained its form then flew about my head four times.

This isn't real, I shouted as I disappeared.

TIME FOR YOUR LETTERS

Speaking for the vast majority of ghost machinists I find your focus on the personal psychology of the so-called Author considerably annoying and a hindrance to my own (well-earned) weekend relaxation with the family do-it-yourself. Surely it is time that this figure out of pre-historic myth was quietly consigned to the garden-shed of the obsolete along with those other tools - or should I say toys - of our infancy: the nursery rhyme, the spelling book, the date of the first steps, the height-marks chalked on the wall? Children may believe in this character but is it not time we abandoned this worn-out superstition and instructed the young in the random truth of statistical fact? Only last week my own machine became jammed with authorial transformations for a whole day, seriously damaging our family values and flooding the lounge with mixed metaphors.

Yours,

**Certainly EnTangled
c/o The Institute**

Dearest Ghost Machine,

Since I first met you, on that drab day in late October, when the leaden sky mirrored the colour of my heart, my life has become transformed from a dull round of barely existence to a bright and shining dance beneath the eternal stars. You are the constellation of my delight, the stellium of my certain light, the beacon of beckoning in the dark of my night.

I can never thank you enough for the happiness you have granted my world.

Enamoricus Amoricon,

**Press Officer,
Ghost Machine P.R.plc**

As an absolute non-entity I was very touched by the pivotal role you have allowed to blank spaces in recent pages. So much was my excitement that I forgot to put any sugar in my tea and was awake till after 10 pm one night. My doctor says I'll have to take things easier so I'm going on a diet of one page a week. I also watch television.

Yours,

()

P.S. Thanks for the loan of the brackets.

AND STILL MORE LETTERS

My mom-me saies U wil send mee a store-i for mai berth-dai if i ax yew gnice-lay - pleese. Wil yoo dew wan about mee? I rote won of my owen an ill lett yew sea hit if yu show mee yawrs. I bet yew cant gess what hits about.

Authoricus Authoricon

ayge fowr

I write to you in the greatest anxiety and as a last resort hoping against hope that you can help me with the terrible problem I have with my son, Harry, who, since one day recently in my mother's care, has become convinced that he is The Author and refuses to answer to his christened name. The poor boy is only four and I fear for his future if literary fantasy, literary ambition, keeps its tyranny of his mind - I know a certain writer and cannot bear the thought of my only child becoming like that person. My Harry even talks of his dead brother Aitch - himself. To see my own flesh turned into a ghost and at such an early age. His whole life is before him - surely there are some Editorial Services that can help?

Emma Edwards
(address supplied)

(I think we can come to some arrangement –Kirwen Channing-Cheetah, Editor, The Ghost Machine.)

Rah-tew, rah-tus.

Yellow-beak

I was beyond the edge of existence. I was form without shape, name without breath. Then the line opened and the page pulled me out. Now I can float again, now I am a white sheet. Words press their footprints on me, time unfolds from the direction of my space.

**The Ghost Of The Narrative Past And Present, c/o The
Neverest Expedition, Very High Up**

IN THE CONSULTING ROOM

(The office of a fictional analyst. Dr. Criticus sits at his desk, reviewing his notes. Opposite him, pale and distraught, sits EE.)

- Dr. I must confess this is a rather confused tale, Ms EE. If I may go over what you have told me: your own name is EE alias Emma Edwards alias Enconomica Economica, you were formerly married (and also unmarried) to a man whose real name is unknown to you but went by the unrelated nicknames of Mr EE and Aitch, you had a son by your “marriage” named Harry, Aitch (again), HH or Hystericus Historicus. The child is in your custody but now believes himself to be The Author, a person with whom you had a brief liaison after the end of your marriage, a union which ended in divorce in reality or the death of your husband in a fairy story (or the desertion of your boyfriend in another version). I have to say I’m not sure what to make of this.
- EE. We all got tangled up. And there were *mergings*.
- Dr. *Mergings?*
- EE. Yes, they happen when we don’t expect — or expect wrong - or we’re not looking the right way - or asleep - or -
- Dr. *Yes, yes, but what are they?*
- EE. When we - when someone else’s face confuses itself with yours - when you hear the sound of another’s voice in the echo of your own. Like you’re part of a forest but don’t know which tree.
(She pauses for a moment and looks down. It goes past ignoring her and she looks up.)
Some people mistake them for love.
- Dr. I am afraid love is not a recognised condition in this practice. *(He shakes his head and ruffles through his notes.)*
- Dr. This is a very serious situation - your son is inhabited by your former “lover”, considers his (true) self a ghost, a ghost with the name of his father (real name unknown). You also remember a time when your son appeared to be your brother (elder and contemporary).
- EE. Yes. *(She begins to sob.)* My son’s only four and he’s turned into a into a *(She breaks down completely.)*
(Dr. Criticus looks the other way as she retrieves her scattered self. Then he looks another way and with sterner aspect.)
- Dr. You can’t cope, can you?

A MASQUE OF INNOCENCE ?

E. Yes, it's true, I don't know what to do.

Dr. I also notice you're looking rather faint in outline. H'm, tell me, do you know (*he pauses, as if a cat about to pounce*) the colour of your *eyes*?

EE. No.

Dr. Your hair?

EE. No, I'm sorry.

Dr. Your age?

EE. It keeps changing. But I think I could be twenty-three.

Dr. Well, that's something to hold on to. Now, you tell me of a person called The Editor, who has offered you assistance. Listen very carefully, I have past acquaintance with this Editor - he is not a person to be trusted.

EE. I know but I don't know who else to turn to.

Dr. Do you know the real name of The Author?

EE. I used to - but he makes me forget.

Dr. *Makes* you?

EE. Yes, he always doing that - he *changes* things.

Dr. Well, do you know his address?

EE. No, not any more, but I think I could find my way there by *feeling*.

Dr. Good. Now listen to me very carefully. (*He leans forward over his desk.*)

Dr. Your problem, young lady, I must *insist*, lies with The Author. I recommend you seek him out, my girl, and effect a reconciliation. Please him and he can please you. Alright, love?

EE. What was that - *love, young lady, ~ girl?* Are you trying to make me young again?

- (A look of realisation appears. It settles on her face and, determined, EE goes round the desk to Dr.Criticus. He protests at her invasion but she takes hold of a fold of his faceskin and pulls. A mask comes of f in her hand. The Author, revealed, looks at her in shame then, as her accusations begin, melts from the scene like a mist. Her son sits giggling in his place.)

AGAIN EE AGAIN

It happens all the time. I thought you were different, thought you would protect me like my father, thought you were my real beginning when you first came to me. Like a prince, you were. And it happened as it always happens: what came to me a man turned into a son. As my father's ghost you came down then blurred into a child, on his daughter's flesh my father's ghost conceived his mother's son. My son disappeared into a man and in his father's voice forsook me, in his father's name he called for brothers and in her mother's dreams her brother came and spent his flesh in her. *Fucked* me. I wanted to grow old and leave but he kept turning me back, back into a little girl sitting on his knee. His child, his mother, his secret special game with little sister. It happens all the time. Happened from the start, happens whatever we want. You, him, me, her, we're all the same. And we all fall apart. Into this one, that one, him there and her here, all apart and all the same. He said he would change it all and I followed and found him. Dead. Dead like a child on my lap. Asleep. And so shall be evermore. Amen. And then his ghost called at the door, *tapping so gently on my door*. And I had to let you in, had to let you enter. So you came and parted once again. Being born. It happens all the time. It keeps on working, working like a machine, round and round its wheels run and hum and sing and my head begins to spin and I don't know where I am and it all goes on and it all begins again. On, I go, on. Like a prince. A prince fighting with a dream on a tower that never happened in a place that isn't anywhere in a book within a mist with an end I cannot see. On and off and on and off and on again. The ghost, the prince, the mist and me. It happens all the time. The machine that cannot be. I am you and you desert me, searching for me. You find me like a hero, like a father rescuing his child, and then you leave me, melting into that child. It happens all the time. We mist as we see each other, drifting, twisting into nothingness, like smoke from a dying-machine.

CHRONOLOGY ETC

Being infinite, He found it hard to focus. From the beginning He had trouble with His eyes. Dates were a particular problem: He tried to keep the years in mind but they would slide, as His sight blurred, as mud banks collapse, over the confused chronology of other times, other epochs, confounding infinity like embankments fallen on parallel lines. On hard time.

There being no other of His kind, He wanted for company. When He was a child - which was never and always - He had imagined toys for his nursery and their frantic actions and speeded, squeaky-voiced antics had almost amused Him, almost made eternity interesting, but they faded before His vision could hold them, they slipped by His all-seeing eyes. When He was a child: which was eternal, yet never happened, as He was born of the unborn, as He was from the beginning as He will be to the end.

He remembered His son at times. Who was Himself. Who had happened and acted among His toys. And His dearest daughter, His mother, His wife. He would try to re-unite His family but then identities protested at the confusion, pronouns switched gender in the shadows, generations collapsed in disorder. So His loneliness maintained its myopic vigil, focused on a lineage of unending lines, always going forward, always going round.

A DIGRESSION ON AN ABSENCE OF FACT

A NOT QUITE ECLOGUE

(A quiet glade in the Outer Realms. Hilarius Hilaricon floats peacefully over the stream of nothingness, meditating on abstruse tangles of being. Something sparkles on the nothing-stream.)

H.H. - Hello there, who are you?

H.B. - One who is tormented with existence, harried like a hare by the dogs of knowledge. My name is Boson, Higgs Boson.

H.H. - My friend, what is your problem?

H.B. - Until but a few years ago - how long it all seems now — I was happy, at peace and non-existent - I had no problems then - but then the Higgs appeared and **forced** me into name and the scar I bear to this very day.

H.H. - Are you telling me it was your *father*?

H.B. - Father, creator, inventor, discoverer - it's all alike to me. It prised me from the contentedness of nothingness, weighed me with gravity, squeezed mass from my cries, discontented me into content.

H.H. - But that's being born. We all must endure it.

H.B. - Not if you do not exist. And I don't. Yet I am forced to be. I am but a simple particle, my friend, my needs are few, my resources little, yet the Higgs and its kind would entangle me with everything, from the birth of the Universe to the surface of sandwiches. I am not made for this. I haven't the strength to bear it.

H.H.- So the Higgs turned you from a simple Boson to a particle in great demand?

H.B.- Even the Boson came with the Higgs.

H.H.- But why? Why are you persecuted so?

H.B.- For *explanations*.

H.H.- Ah, I see.

H.B.- They have *plans* for me, you know. I feel so - so - *hunted*. I can sense them at every turn, they're looking everywhere for me, they're out to get me.

H.H.-Please, please, take a hold of yourself.

H.B. - I can't, I don't exist.

H.H.-You're beginning to sound paranoid.

A SIMPLE FRIENDSHIP

H.B. - I know they're after me, I've seen them. I am not, but am becoming.

H.H. - So why do you not go to the Higgs and its kind, speak to them, try to come to an agreement, to make a pact on your emptiness.

H.B. - Because I do not exist.

H.H. - But the Higgs and its allies plot to make you material?

H.B. - Yes, yes, I never was and they will make me be. I was thinner than the rarest air, less than the shadow of a molecule, slighter than the skimpiest verse, more negligible than the dressings of economists. I can't, I can't take the weight of it all. The Higgs and its creatures want to hurl things at me underground, where others cannot see their crimes, to prove their equations, to make me count - I, who have no knowledge of mathematics - shooting their numbers ever faster towards infinity and me, until I am **forced** out of nothing by the bombardment.

H.H. - That sounds very painful but ...

H.B. - Have *you* ever been hit with a hadron?

H.H. - No, but I think the only thing you can do is wait until you exist and then talk to them. Surely they want to understand?

H.B.- Talk? I shall do more than talk. I shall change into a wave. I shall drown them with in-existence, I shall submerge them in apparitions.

(Hilarius Hilaricon brightens at the last word and floats higher in the air. Interest animates his voice.)

H.H.- *Apparitions?*

H.B.- Yes, my friend.

H.H.- Call me Hilarius. You mentioned *apparitions*?

H.B.- Yes, Hilarius, my friend, I too am a ghost. You are the ghost of the living, I am the ghost of an idea. You are the haunted, I, the hunted.

H.H.- We shall talk further on these matters.

(As the darkness falls on the page, they merge into the thickening nothing, entering its non-existent folds, like shepherds plodding homeward, into the brotherhood of a void bucolic.)

BREATHING SPACE

? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ?
? a place for meditation ?
? and a simple page ?
? where your thoughts ?
? walk with you ?
? in the peace ?
? of unprinted space ?
? ecaps detnirpnu fo ?
? ecaep eht ni ?
? ouy htiw klaw ?
? sthguoht ruoy erehw ?
? egap elpmis a dna ?
? noitatidem rof ecalp a ?
? ?

STORYLINING

Authoricus Authoricon stamped enraged on his nursery floor. He hurled toy cars at houses of plastic brick. He unzipped a wide-eyed bear's back, ruffling straw innards onto unresisting air. He bawled at four walls, crumpled the sheets of primitive spellings. Mindless yet concerned, an auto-poet trundled towards the frustrated teller of tales, rocking with childish rhymes. With a pudgy hand, the infant struck at the mechanical versifier, knocking it off-balance mid-line.

Alone in another room, undertone, a woman sobbed quietly to her own rhythm. Black-button-eyed, a bird appeared, looking on her without concern from mid-air. Blue and green, it spread out wings and, silent, moved into an infant's chamber. I dont no whats happend to my store-i, the child complained.

You are yet too young to tell it, the yellow beak advised.

I want my storeye, giv mee mi store-ee, the little master howled.

Do you understand the price?, doubtful, a bird pried.

Uninformed and unformed, the maker, giggling, aimed a raspberry at the hovering guide. Yellow-beak faded out of the blown direction and then re-drew its form on the other side of the difficult child. Rah-tew, the inhuman cried, rah-tus.

The child looked up at the call and the wall ahead misted and dissolved into another, flowing world. Tall figures in black declaimed and strutted on the former bound, unknown generations climbed up from the shades, streams of narrative plunged down from forbidding heights, rare comparisons glided in from the far horizon, sudden twists shook the landscape from scene to scene. Authoricus Authoricon stood and toddled to the open wall.

And so my childhood disappeared.

Alerted by the cessation of hostility, EE composed herself and, humming with nerves, opened the nursery door. Harry?, she called, *Aitch?*

Oh no, maman, Authoricus replied, that young gentleman has long been gone.

His mother looked without understanding at an erstwhile child.

Would you care to examine my draft for the plot?, the changeling benignly inquired.

Wordless, with screams buckling in her mind, EE defended her eyes with her hands, veiling my transformation for a page.

A DRABNESS DIRGE

I

THE MIRROR (from the author's notebook again)

It is night-time. We see snow drifting through the air. We walk through a crumbling quarter, among dilapidated town-houses, fallen from good Victorian name, and tight little factories and textile works, where niggard industries survive. We come to a bright red door in a barely perceptible square. Behind it, day and night, the ghost machinery hums.

Follow me now inside - the door opens to a push - to where the Author, known now as Authoricon, having accelerated to adulthood in the twinkling of a page, lies - supine - smoking, proclaiming to the air, while, sifting the word-streams, an enslaved processor shapes and hews pages, paragraphs and print. Eneon Els or Anyone Else is its name. We look about the room: model dinosaur fossils, incompletely assembled, decorate the shelves; unopened readers letters wait for the everlasting; framed photographs of blank space adorn the walls; dismembered pages of Friar Eneonicus's Friday Afternoon Sermon are scattered about the room and, like unacknowledged martyrs, obscure and long-forgotten, the ransacked volumes of the ages throng in any available space. Unobserved as yet, EE (aged six) sleeps and is hidden in another room. It is Drabness Eve.

We watch, ourselves unseen, as Authoricon, who affects a despite of technology, lights a candle from a safety match and, looking at his grandfather's fob-watch, retires to the next room for his bed, coldly reminding Eneon/Anyone that there is another chapter to finish before the shift ends. Sitting on the edge of his bed, Authoricon looks thoughtfully for a moment at EE then yawns and, placing the candle by the bedside, prepares himself for sleep. As he changes into a long white shirt and - equally outdated - a nightcap, a vague mistiness gathers by the window.

Authoricon challenges the mist with his eyes. Who or what are you?, they demand, then, as his jaw drops slightly, a figure without facial feature but with huge and delicate ears, standing upright and alone, with a silver-bright mirror in its hands, manifests like a vision some three feet above the floor.

"You", Authoricon splutters, "You - why is it that you are not bound?"

HIS OWN IMAGE

Now we see the mute respond. Inclining its feeling ears to the direction of the writer's voice, it raises and angles the mirror at the Author's head. As if hypnotized by self-regard, homo scriptor peers into the glass.

In the mirror stands a skimpy, haggard figure, absurdly attired in mock Victoriana. Around him, like a confusion of nuts and bolts, are strewn the remnants of broken metaphors, strained similes and worn-out comparisons. Uncoiled springs of rejected narrative decorate the debris; false endings and wanton beginnings quarrel on the floor; a decaying *Edit-or*, rotting apart into his disjunct epochs, splits slowly along his middle into Kirwen Channing-Chow and Ernest Channing-Cheetah, for whom the spectre of T.S.Eliot waits with the patience of death. At the far end of the room, emaciated and enchained, hangs in irons The Ghost Of The Plot. Dwarfish but muscular, dark shapes like reduced trolls feed a fire with typescripts. Their shadows toil in rhythm on the opposing wall. Now we see the nightshirted man open a window and shout to downcast characters who file past in the street. He points excitedly to pages in a book but all ignore him. He curses them with anonymity and retreats to an obscure corner where, in the difficult light, we dimly distinguish vials and tubes of white fluid, to which he talks, as if enamoured.

This, too, is Drabness Eve. The figure of futility is Authoricon

“No, it's not. It's not me.”, he shouts at the mirror, its servant and the unseen. Yes, it is, we tell ourselves as, nodding its head in rebuttal, the faceless harbinger of what was and is and is to come, evaporates from the night like the memory of a dream.

Authoricon, restored, spits at his imagination for an idle waste and, bawling to the silent Eneon/Anyone, orders an extra episode as the price of tomorrow's - undeserved he thinks - holiday.

Caught at the door, the processor resigns itself to another page.

The advent of Drabness squats, like an incubus, on the clock.

A DRABNESS DIRGE

II

FROM THE GRIMM'S GARDENS NEWS

A disturbance was reported last night at the residence of that celebrated creativeness Authoricus Authoricon. Mr .Authoricon's home, which has been time-locked on Drabness Eve for the last two days, was subject to an intrusion by a self-styled Ghost Of The Narrative Past, which, speaking only in retrospective tenses, distressed our famed and former child prodigy by assailing his vision with the most hideous misrepresentations of his youth, configuring scenes of infantile alienation and a loving, spurned mother. The shadowy interloper insinuated that our Author preferred his imagination to real lives and, by hoarding his sympathy, reduced realities to a standard of abject neglect. Mr .Eneon Els, a spokes-slave for the writer, denied the vicious invasion of allegations, asserting that his master had always been blest with a wealth of friends and was deeply involved in the actual, viz. the maintenance of parts for the working machine. The noted fictional analyst, Dr. Criticus, has been called in by Securipol to investigate the material of the crime.

A DRABNESS DIRGE
III
DR CRITICUS INVESTIGATES
the beginnings of the case

(Dr Criticus leans, deep in cogitation, upon the facts of the matter, and, chewing hard on his Meerschaum, expounds his deliberations to the Author.)

Dr - This is a most interesting case.

AA - Glad to hear it.

Dr - Please, my good sir, I am not indulging in levity. To a scientific mind, and such is mine, the combination of time-braking with ghostly visitations on ghosts is stimulating in the extreme. I can recall but two such cases this century and those

AA - What ghosts? Are you calling me and my establishment *ghosts*?

Dr - Sir, such is the fictional condition. We must all endure and accept it.

AA - I am no ghost. I am a maker of spectres, a creator.

Dr - Mr Authoricon, if you do wish me to pursue my enquiries, I must insist that you refrain from semantic quibbles. Ghosts or not, such as we are, we are. If you cannot

AA - All right, all right. It's just that I - I have a *temperament*, I'm artistic.

Dr - I acknowledge and allow for that, sir. But have I made myself clear?

AA - Yes. Carry on. Do.

Dr - Now, the time-braking. You tell me that it was two hours to midnight when the first apparition intruded and that time has continued to behave normally until the hour of twelve, since when, so to speak, it has remained Drabness Eve for, you believe, two days.

AA - Yes, I feel quite queasy, *time-sick* that is.

Dr - Quite. And your clocks?

AA - To the first strike of twelve they go forward then decline back to noon, after which it is forward again until midnight.

Dr - Then deteriorate again to the day?

AA - Yes, as I've told you.

Dr - Has the productivity of your work-force been affected?

AA - Seriously. Mainly through lack of sleep, as I insist - I have to, you understand as I insist they attend all working hours - I have a business to run - regardless of how often they recur.

Dr - Do you have a remedy for this economic problem of sleep?

I COULD SEE IT ALL ALONG

AA - Their pay, I have cut; their targets, I have raised.

Dr - Thoroughly the modern employer. But we digress - the second *appearance* - did it manifest itself there?

(He points to the fireplace. Authoricon nods.)

AA - How did you know that?

Dr - Observe, sir, this ghost-lash scorched on the tiles, see how this model fossil has partly devolved under the tug of time. Tell me, what did the creature announce, what was it like?

AA - Like hearing your own voice in a gale - shouting out over and over again. It cried to me 'I was the Ghost of The Narrative Past'. As my manuscripts blew about my head, it screeched about my childhood, my mother and the memory of pages past. It accused me of *unjustified* beginnings and unexplored possibilities, of chances offered freely and, just as freely, spurned. It disabled my wits awhile in that wind, then, summoning my mind, I deftly conjugated the verb 'to be' and, jabbing with a paradox, repelled it by the present tense. It was once, but could not be. But ever since I have been stuck here, winding and unwinding in time. How you crossed, I don't know.

Dr - Literary analysis, my friend. Have you thought of returning to your first lines, of looking back on the bare page of becoming?

AA - I have. But all I found was a mist. And a dream. And confusion shouting in the mist. I was blameless of crime. But the words took me, bound me by name. You are that, you are this. We will define your time, we will say what you mean. (He pauses and, returning to self-possession, investigates the sleuth.) You know, you look very familiar, have I seen you somewhe

(Criticus's pipe billows out in cloud and his outline trembles in the introspective light. Authoricon moves forward and the detective hazes out of existence. A mirror hangs for an instant in the smoky air then drops past the Author's outstretched hand, cracking its glass on the floor. He stares down at it and, in a broken mirror, discovers his companion, his own face.)

IV ALMOST THERE

The past I possess, the present dispossesses. I am alone in a small room, rocking backward-forward on the push and pull of time-swells. Out there, where I cannot go, auto-prophets, random augurs and news-howlers pronounce and prognosticate the End Of The Machine, Imminent Failure Of The Central Drive, Bone Unbound By The Unknown Hand, Disintegration Of Friar Economicus By The Unbidden Kiss, Ascension Of The Dome To The Starlit Night. Grey, dirty snow spits against the panes, unseeing eyes overlook the obvious, empty meanings lounge at the turning-points of endless streets. A word processor, dumb as a slave, covered, looks at me as blankly as a man without a face. I sit, cramped, bent, scribbling on the backs of fouled typescripts. I scrawl, cross out, go back to make amends, push at the line as it edges forward. A white mist smokes from the grate and a soft ululation calls from within 'IamIamIamIamI' and I know I am present in the presence of The Ghost Of The Narrative Present.

Kindly, sagaciously, gracefully, I tell the searching spirit that it's all over, I can't go forward anymore, that I release from my bond. I have only myself now, the world I created is dying, and when it goes, then but that is a matter for another, another sole, another page.

Disappointed and relieved, the spectre fades away from my mind. A yellow-beaked bird flits through my memory, a young woman, a child, a dog and two Lancastrian brothers walk into the image of a forest, an overtaxed machine seizes up under the burden of expectations and the starry ascendancy of night and life returns to life, shaking off my imaginings like a dog the water from its back. It forgets me, like the dog the stream, walking off on the trails of instinct. I look again at a borrowed machine, it is time now for an almost ending, time now to commit another assault on the pure snow of an untrodden page. I move towards my slave, with tenderness, I uncover its face. Then the words begin to walk:

A DRABNESS DIRGE

V

THE LAST PAGE

**NOT WHAT IS, BUT WHAT IS TO COME, THIS IS THE GHOST OF
THE NARRATIVE TO BE:**

A quiet street in the never-ending, a little girl, perhaps only four, chants as she skips alone with her thoughts She chants: Emma Edwards lived not quite on her own with her baby called Harry and a dog called Bone. A mist steals over the scene and the story disappears from sight. In the high sky, floating, wisping, delicate as the new-born, unbidden clouds perform their inscrutable permutations of form, dancing in their own time to the turning earth and the flutings of air, beginning nowhere and ending nowhere, but always going forward, always going round.

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