

2HB

A FIRST
ENCYCLOPÆDIA OF TLÖN

VOL. XXIII.

A FIRST
ENCYCLOPÆDIA OF TLÖN

A
DICTIONARY

OF
THE GREATEST WORK OF MAN

ENGLISH EDITION

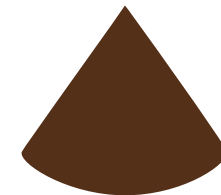
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2HB *vol.2*

Contents

6

After The Joy
BECKY BEASLEY

8

Eye Mouth
CARA TOMLIE

9

Flooded Town
CARA TOMLIE

10

Dead Hands
A Story of Many Parts
KATHRYN ELKIN

16

Extispicium
DEREK BEAULIEU

18

For Helen
DEREK BEAULIEU

After the Joy

BECKY BEASLEY *After the Joy*

BECKY BEASLEY

It's not obviously about happiness, but more the productivity of the kind of unhappiness capable of making something separate from itself.

In the midst of so much noise something happened which finally silenced me. All the years of speech and gossip rose up before me and I became mute once again. The sense of place became acute, as if I had become grounded at last. It began slowly, simply the sound of something moving around almost imperceptibly in the next room. It wasn't anything obvious, nor anything I had not already experienced a thousand times. Through the wall, a body in space presented itself to me, as a murmur, in the form of one voice separated from another, as if someone talking on a phone. Having never been able to eavesdrop, even in close proximity and without distraction, the lack of detail was not new.

The walls formed and softened. The floors became dense and earthy. I no longer wanted to climb inside these boxes or slip between the cracks in the floorboards. I wanted the boxes to be rid of me once and for all. I wanted to walk freely across the floor. In my joy, it was all I could do to keep from jumping out of the window. I roamed about, pulling things at random from the shelves and piles and tubes in which they were stored. It was all so forlorn and lonely. No wonder things had become so hopeless. I could see it all around me. The colour drained out before my eyes. It was all grey. Gloomy, dismal, sad. The saddest thing imaginable. Was this all I had to show for my best efforts? It became incomprehensible. Finally, I saw what my father saw. Nothing! No, worse than that: nothing much.

The horror from which I emerged that afternoon is indescribable. Or worse: pitiable. I was the most embarrassing daughter in the world and this was what I had to show for all his patience and silence. It was all over and the relief was immense.

()

What joy, and how lonely it is to feel this happiness. The dead air, the mute presence of this thing on the floor, the kind of oblivion which can only be reached at the limits of frustration. After all these years. The unwavering belief. What madness! It doesn't even matter that what happened has come

right at the very end. With a moment's hindsight (for very little time has elapsed), how else would it have appeared. It is the hovering at the instant of being finished and done with it that is the joy. The search is over. I am alive.

()

What to do. Now the question changes. What to do. What next. How can a move be made which would appropriately...No, not that. Rather, how might the most inappropriate move now be made. How to follow through on joy.

If what occurred earlier were the result of an act of friendship, a sudden ending exerted in space, out of desperation, then what kind of thing was this? It certainly came out of something which in no way resembled an afternoon, although it was undoubtedly an afternoon of sorts. If a stumbling block which emanated out of gloom and ridiculousness was capable of producing something so stillborn, so hopeful, what else might be possible in its aftermath?

My first answer would be indistinguishable from all previously written.

The force of the noise had kept the silence at bay for so long that what was once silent had been almost entirely forgotten. The exhilarating newness of the experience of the afternoon revealed how restrictive it had all been. There were so many things pressing at the edges for so long that the surrender occurs smoothly and is very comfortable. One day it is easier to run than to remain. But the running doesn't look athletic, quite the opposite in fact, only the appearance of progress. That's how it works. What is needed is not sport. Something which is the opposite of effort is required in these dark times.

At once the space cleared is replenished with more of the same, alas.

NO NOT I NOR EYE SHALL LEARN.IT SHALL PRACTICE, I SHALL TOO AND LEARNING SHALL ALSO. I, IT, ME, THAT, THIS AND PRACTICING AND LEARNING.

They sat opposite each other. He had called her back for an extra rehearsal. "Now" he said "Place your finger gently at the top of your ear, follow the line round your face till it reaches the corner of your eye..stop there" She shuddered. "ok" he said "now, take the same finger and place it at the bottom of your ear, follow the line of your face round till it reaches the corner of your mouth" She did so and physically shuddered once again. "*..and from the top..*"

The man in the shirt arrived first. He sat in the armchair next to the fire and warmed his damp hands. The room was dark, the only light came from the fire and a small, dim lamp in the corner. He had been there for 40 minutes before the stalky man appeared, drenched from head to toe. He removed all of his wet clothed until he stood completely naked, shivering profusely. She followed shortly, by which time the stalky man was wrapped in a blanket, gazing vacantly into the fireplace. "Am I late?" she said. "In relation to what" asked the man in the shirt. There was an awkward silence which lasted until the stalky man could take it no more and began the conversation.

NO, NOT I NOR EYE SHALL LEARN.IT SHALL PRACTICE, I SHALL TOO AND LEARNING SHALL ALSO. I, IT, ME, THAT, THIS AND PRACTICING AND LEARNING.

DEAD HANDS

A STORY OF MANY PARTS

KATHRYN ELKIN DEAD HANDS

One

SKIP JAMES GLAD

Far from the details of his daily life bringing nearer to me the nature of his inspiration and making it clearer, it is the whole mythical singularity of his condition which the writer emphasizes by such confidences. For I cannot but ascribe to some superhumanity the existence of beings vast enough to wear blue pyjamas at the very moment when they manifest themselves as universal conscience...

Mythologies, Roland Barthes

The task provided some sort of ossature to support myself with. The vomit had been approximately intruding into this space I had been slowly filling up with my own personality, exploiting its current state of emptiness and the subsequent opportunity afforded to abandon any idea of doing some work for my money. I began to perform my lunatic chore, sluicing the vomit away from the front door in feeble half-attempts. I would have gladly ignored the pink heap had it not been for the foresight that it would be pointed out to me endlessly by others who would be of the opinion that I should do something about it, the vomit having marred the doorway of a listed building. I had a sense that I had divined I would be forced to interact with vomit a few days before, having spent some time reflecting that I found it to be the worst of all the unpleasantries one – or worse – another might spill forth.

This particular vomit was consistent in texture – well digested and unyielding as to what its original components may have been in the first instance. It was a pink paste, crusting like drying humus around its peninsula, and almost fibrous and felt-like in places. I poured a jug of cold water over it, to little effect. Some of its most wet area was carried off, so not entirely discouraged I repeated this action four more times, pleased when flaps and curls of the cake were swept away through my increasingly deft pours. Two of the jugs I filled with soda water from the café as an experiment, but this made no remarkable difference to my rate of progress. People filed past as the pungent vomit-water poured down the slope of the

pavement. A policeman walked past and I balked for a moment wondering if I might be reprimanded for my actions. *Well, it isn't as if I am moving the vomit from inside the building onto the street – it is already on the street*, I reasoned. I could hardly be expected to scoop it up and take it inside the building to dispose of it. I then had the idea to let the remaining vomit soften up for a while and come back to it in a more concentrated effort.

After an hour or so, during which I read the newspaper, I filled up the jug with diluted floor cleaner and threw that over the spot. I felt sure that my witnesses were interpreting this as a much more socially responsible action on seeing the suds. I repeated this twice more, then retreated for a further two hours. During this second reprise I allowed the thought that had been at the back of my mind to present itself properly, this being that I was perfectly aware the remedy for this determined vomit was the application of *boiling* water. The inconvenience of needing to travel up two flights of stairs to boil a kettle had been significant enough for me to indulge in all the too-ing and fro-ing from the taps on the ground floor. One kettle-full of boiling water, one jug of cold, and I was satisfied that I might be judged to have 'cleaned up' the mess. A thin wash of pink with a raised edge was certainly discernable but would anyone have me scrub the pavement?

Excuse me! This area is sterile at the moment.

I was (and remain) quite unsure as to what I was meant to understand by that statement. The immediate anticipation was that I discontinue my walk towards the sterile area, which I duly obliged with the utmost passivity. It is of course impossible that any outdoor area be sterile at a given moment. The man who stopped me was in plain clothes, though I quickly discerned that he had a radio or walkie-talkie in his pocket, not that this accessory was necessary for me to comply with him. *What could he be inferring by sterile?* I wondered as I reversed the direction I was walking in. I wasn't going anywhere anyway – just trying to walk myself into a better frame of mind and listening to some embarrassing music I enjoyed during my youth (which I will refrain from naming) in an effort to have my sense of humour about myself return. Sterile. The only accident or crime that I could conceive of that might sterilise an area was some sort of nuclear disaster, and the man who stopped me was not appropriately flustered for that to have happened.

This area is sterile at the moment.

There were other people retreating from the sterile area, but it was all very informal. No flashing lights or cordons or shouting. A woman picked up her toddler, who had been busy building a modest snowman on a square of grass by a car park near the sterile area. I had noted how this square of grass had held the dwindling snow in a patch of perfect white. *Lucky to have found a patch of untouched snow by late afternoon*, I thought. The child would be too young to appreciate that.

There were men in fluorescent jackets outside the museum near the sterile area. Perhaps there were always men in fluorescent jackets outside the museum. I wasn't sure, but I was already fairly reconciled to not finding out what happened being in the habit of only listening to the national news on Radio 4, and I didn't think whatever had happened would warrant coverage. I tried imagining that it was indeed a nuclear disaster and that we would all be dropping dead or turning inside out in a few hours, attempting to prolong my interest in the situation. My curiosity was more in line with a vague linguistic zeal.

I got home and made myself another acrid dandelion tea as punishment for not having returned in a better mood. Aptly, my mother had sent me the box of tea for my birthday. I decided that since things hadn't improved in spite of some efforts with myself in the morning and my addressing a whole manner of things that might have been bothering me subconsciously, I had best accept that it was no good struggling any further. Perhaps there was no harm in continuing in this state. Perhaps it would be useful.

How else will I ever produce anything if I don't sit down and have a proper think about myself?

No – the problem is that I can't think beyond myself, and that is why I am miserable and bored. I can't think up another character.

I can only write in the first person. I live in the third person.

I don't even know who the second person is.

This area is sterile at the moment.

Leave a bit of space for the Holy Ghost.

I heard that on a program on Radio 4 as advice for couples dancing in the 50s and thought it was a clever phrase. It was put to me that that is the manner in which I embrace people. I wrap my arms around the other person tightly while bending forward severely from the hips, seemingly in order to leave the maximum amount of space possible between our lower

halves. I have never been advised directly to leave a bit of space for the Holy Ghost myself.

I put on a Skip James record, feeling quite pleased about owning it and listening to it on my own on a Thursday afternoon. It seemed like something somebody I might like to be would do, and I felt like giving myself a bit of a performance of character. He sang a song – one of the more hysterical ones – that goes,

Ahm so glad

Ahm so gl-ha-e-yad

Ahm sooo glad I don't know whadt to do-hoo!

It seemed he would rather be very upset about things, as is usual to him, and was dissatisfied with his current state of *gladness*. *Perhaps I'm glad then*. I had half thought that I might like to howl along as I had done (almost) spontaneously on first hearing the record. Not that day though. No singing. I listened to both sides of the record and then got up and brushed my teeth as another small concession to myself. I would brush my teeth three or four times a day had the dentist not warned me that I was making my gums recede. I watched myself in the mirror, trying to restrain the scrubbing.

Where is the thread of my narrative? Where is this means to forge meaning, to have meaning explode into my consciousness?

What I wanted was some sudden and unholy detonation of rude understanding.

Two***THE SECOND PERSON***

I had an intuitive understanding of the personalities of authors, I seemed to see in each of them a reflection of myself, and I would go on thinking and feeling in the style of a particular book until a new one had influenced me in its turn.

Little Herr Friedman, Thomas Mann

I resumed my hesitant search for something or other by feeling about amongst the words of another. Savouring the inflections of the writer to whom I had most recently surrendered myself, I stumbled along with an unproductive chaos of half-formed thoughts and images removing

me from each of the day's undertakings. I wanted to take up what I could from my disjointed recollections and distil things down, working everything into a concentrated pitch that I could hold on to. I wanted something that would be particular to me - a sort of forced singularity in my method of consumption.

I had been sleeping badly, and sleeping badly always made me seem, or at least feel, guilty. During my waking hours I suffered from a malevolent and malicious inner monologue that regularly managed to find itself pronounced aloud during my unguarded moments. Its primary aim was to make people I encountered think badly of me by having me be needlessly cruel, or alternatively boastful and vain. The words would come pouring out of me at such a rate that all I could do was look on in sympathy at my latest victim, sharing in their astonishment at the vigour of my unprovoked assault. Of course, I was aware these cruel or vain thoughts were not wholly new inventions and this other voice was now one of my own. This particular voice had simply found a means to assume dominance during the disturbances of the night.

I carried my book about with me during the long days. My mind was full of static. I had turned the book into a prop of kinds, having no intention of reading it within daylight hours. I hoped it might emanate an aura that could explain or remind me of my newest other self. Something was missing - some part of me that I was accustomed to was fugitive. I wasn't sure whether I was experiencing a simple loss that might later be recovered, or suffering a permanent addition that had necessarily displaced something else. I wasn't sure what I would prefer.

I took another late afternoon walk towards the sterile area, and finding no impediment to my walking up this particular street, continued along as had been usual. The notion of nuclear fall-out had attached itself to this place in my imagination in a way I had not anticipated, and as I walked along I began to remember that I had been dreaming of this street in the darkest depths of sleep that I was able to penetrate. The place had been made strange to me through the mysterious action I had failed to witness and my subsequent dream, and its new unfamiliarity sharpened my senses. I ambled along the warped pavement that rose and fell manically from the force of powerful roots of the trees lining the street. It struck me that the agitated pavement was of significant appeal to me - the agitated pavement that nobody had done nor could do anything about. Suddenly I began to pick up my pace, half hoping to trip over one of these determined undulations. I didn't want my revisiting the scene to go unmarked, so I

tried to draw attention to myself by letting my eyes well up as if I was subject to some great upset that was on the verge of overtaking me. Amongst all this action I acknowledged to myself that I was attempting to channel the mannerisms of the book's protagonist, having tucked a newspaper under my arm as an effect and adapting my gait into something rather more elegant.

This is becoming ridiculous - you never cut a poorer figure than when you try and imitate someone else. You aren't upset in the slightest - you didn't even invent this psychic disorder. Your grasp of yourself is not sophisticated enough for it to be possible.

No - I'm not ashamed of owing this to someone else. I owe a great deal of other people my notions and truths.

Since it wasn't dark, since it wasn't yet time to reopen the book, I returned home, sat down on the floor of my room and put the Skip James record back on.

Next..

Three

ROOM FOR THE HOLY GHOST

...convinced that my thoughts would have seemed pure foolishness to that perfected spirit, I had so completely obliterated them all that, if I happened to find in one of his books something which had already occurred to my own mind, my heart would swell as though some deity had, in his infinite bounty, restored it to me, had pronounced it to be good and right.

Swanns Way, Marcel Proust

Four

SsAaNnGgFfRrOoLiDd

or THE SLIGHT RETURN

...Deviser of the voice and of its hearer and of himself. Deviser of himself for company. Leave it at that. He speaks of himself as of another. He says speaking of himself; He speaks of himself as of another. Himself he devises too for company. Leave it at that. Confusion too is company up to a point. Better hope deferred than none. Up to a point. Better a sick heart than none. Till it starts to break. So speaking of himself he concludes, For the time being leave it at that.

Company, Samuel Beckett

Extispicium.

DEREK BEAULIEU

She was pregnant when she was four months pregnant, three months pregnant when she was seven months pregnant, and not pregnant at all when she was seven months pregnant. But what did she know? Out and out, then out and in.

I was born in the Montréal Jewish Hospital and later at the Montréal General Hospital. I am neither Jewish nor a General. I remember it this way. Generally. I was born partially at the Montréal Jewish Hospital, the remainder was later.

I was born in Montréal. I was born in Montréal or Montreal. I was born in Montréal or Montreal or Brossard or Longueuil. When I was born I was born in Brossard but then I was born in Longueuil but now I was born in Brossard again but I wasn't born there. I was born in Montréal or Montreal but we lived in Brossard. I was born in Montréal or Montreal but I lived once I was born in Brossard. Brossard was itself and then it was in Longueuil and then it was itself again but the whole time it was part of Montréal or Montreal. I was born in Montreal. Brossard has no cemetery.

I was born at the Montréal Jewish General Hospital and later at the Montréal Children's Hospital, which was appropriate as I was a child. They remember it this way. Once out, taken further out. Down the street.

I was a child, though I am not currently a child. That depends. One can be a child and grow and still be a child. Grow additionally and continue to be a child. Even when one is no longer a child one is still someone's child just as that someone is another's child. Being a child and being a child is different. I was a child when I was taken down the street. I was taken down the street by someone, I was with them, and they were with a child though not with child.

Spurred on by intestine, they had to wait for him to decide what to leave in and what to remove, having already decided to remove me.

If Montreal then Calgary. A one year contract or a two year contract. A deal. Then Montreal then Calgary. A deal is a deal. He was born here, murmuring on the way, he was born here three or four years later and two months later.

Uncontained, I had to be gathered up like a campsite, like a tent. I was supposed to be born on my birthday, instead he was. Murmuring on the way, he was born on my birthday, I was three or four years earlier and two months early.

To gather up like a tent likes twenty-five hours; what fits back in the bag, what is best not brought home. As long as his hand to his watchband, a ruler, his watch.

DEREK BEAULIEU *Extispicium*

Seventeen hours of graph paper and a blue pen, down and down and up. It must be true if its written down, security in a single sheet of graph paper. That was the way he remembered it.

You should arrange for the last rites. I can't do that no I can't do that. Would you rather I made the arrangements? You had better, I can't do that.

Another four hours for a little box and a chicken. An operating room at the hospital, a dining room at home. Stuffed and stuffing. What gets carved apart and what gets put back together. Giblets. Gathered up like campsite, stuffed like a turkey. Merry Christmas in a tube. Do this procedure in the unit. Sim 24, all well.

He was born at the Grace, where he was born isn't there. He was born at the Grace or the Holy. Murmuring on the way, he was born here three or four years later and two months later. Part of the deal, he was born in Calgary. *The resemblance is uncanny, when I watch him I see your father. The way he stands and holds his body, his hands.*

He was on the east end and the south shore, sixth of seven. In and out of the hospital, seven kids in six years. Wash day comes on Sunday, watch the water muddy. That corner of Ste-Catherine's, Air-Liquide is there across Phillips Square, and on that corner is Birks with the ring counter in the door and to the immediate left, right there. And here is where the bus stops. One step off the bus, and the story ends. *You have to ask them. They owe you. Don't leave until you ask them.*

Remembered the announcement as someone else's name, expecting. But there it is, it was mine after all. Half a year in a box, a number in a study. After all this why not let him decide if he wants to look normal? A punch-line, a drunken story.

For Helen

DEREK BEAULIEU



Writers' biographies:

BECKY BEASLEY

Becky Beasley is an artist who lives and works in Antwerp, Belgium. She is represented by Laura Bartlett Gallery, London and Office Baroque, Antwerp. Her work has been included in *Word Event* at Kunsthalle Basel (2008) and *Slow Movement or: Half and Whole* at Kunsthalle Bern (2009). Her writing has been published in *Succour*, *Material* and *Kaleidoscope* and in 2009 will be included in *The Malady of Writing* at MACBA, Barcelona.

DEREK BEAULIEU

Derek Beaulieu is the author, or co-author, of 6 books of poetry and conceptual fiction. His work has been anthologized and exhibited internationally. His most recent book, *local colour*, is a conceptual recasting of *Ghosts* by Paul Auster, and is published by ntamo (Finland, 2008). He lives in Canada.

KATHRYN ELKIN

Along side a writing practice, Kathryn Elkin recently curated the project *MOOT POINTS – Exercises in Self-Organisation, Discourse and Collaboration* at Transmission gallery, November 2008 and is currently co-curating the talk series *Critical Applause* at CCA, Glasgow.

NICK THURSTON

Nick Thurston is author of *Reading the Remove of Literature* (2006) and *Historia Abscondita (An Index of Joy)* (2007), plus numerous journal articles and artists' pages. He has exhibited and performed across Europe and North America, and is Co-Editor of the independent artists' book publisher, information as material.

CARA TOMLIE

Cara Tomlie is an artist based in London and Glasgow. Recent exhibitions include *Event Horizon* as part of *GSK Contemporary* in The Royal Academy, *Last Tango in Partick*, Now Museum Glasgow and a solo exhibition at Sierra Metro Gallery, Edinburgh. She has also recently completed a term as committee member of Transmission Gallery, Glasgow.

Colophon

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