MY VOLUPTUOUS

SCHOPENHAUER

Y.

I met Y. in Amsterdam during the final week of tulip season. I had just spent four months studying abroad in Granada and was traveling for a week before returning home. Y. was a friend of a friend from home, and I found them from Tel Aviv to see the flowers at Keukenhof.

My time in Spain had been satisfying, if rather solitary and ascetic. I had told myself before leaving the U.S. that I was going there to study Spanish, not to tour Europe, and I had kept to that. I had studied hard, I had gotten a practical and skilled and by the end of the four months I was very fluent.

I became friends with a couple of my classmates at the language school, but I also annoyed the majority of them by being the only one who was trying to learn something to just lighten up and speak English and to just go out for drinks and have fun.

As I was staying in an office, I met few girls, and while I was not desperate for a relationship or for sex, I felt a little lonely and I felt a little unattractive. I also seemed to be confusing me in an even more impeding fortress into which fewer and fewer people would probably ever be inclined to try and enter.

Wasn't learning a language meant to be a way to connect with people? Wasn't it meant to be a bridge? What's the point of being such a column scholar of the humanities if it makes you so socially inept and so intellectually righteous that you can't carry on friendly relations with the greater portion of that same humanity you're supposedly trying to understand?

Several months prior, just before leaving for Spain, a bottle of wine said casually and encouragingly as I was walking out the door, "Fuck some bitches."

I had gone to a bar with a friend of mine and had seen Fall in a rare bad form. It was a disastrous night lasted more than a few weeks or that involved anything emotion-wise like revelation or trust or compassion.

And yet, here I was in Spain, ever more homogenized, ever more alone.

My friend had left the country, the semester ended, and I no longer had an excuse to grimly retreat to my bedroom and study like a pastoral.

Another student and I decided to travel together, first to Barcelona, and then to Amsterdam.

Barcelona was a blur of Gaudí, of the Art Gothic architecture, I was in a crabby mood, fastidiously checking the maps, worrying about where we were going and not enjoying whatever we happened to be.

During our flight to the Netherlands, I got a text from Y. saying, "I'm leaving Tel Aviv. If this plane crashes, my life would have been little more than a stressful and joyless waste.

In Amsterdam, my friend and I were smoking a lot of pot, which put me into a happier if somewhat paranoid state of mind. We went to the Van Gogh Museum and a photo exhibit. It was exciting to be in an overwhelmingly Protestant, northern European city, after so much time in the sunny, Catholic South.

Our second night there - and with two nights to go - our friend ditched us for a girl and another guy from our hostel went to a coffee shop.

As soon as we entered, I noticed a slim, dark-haired woman sitting alone, on a sofa by the entrance. She was smoking and looking at me.

After we placed our order, I neared our group to where she was seated. I sat closer to her. After a few minutes and a few more glances, she spoke to me.

She was from Tel Aviv and was a student. She had studied English in college, worked as a translator for several years and hated it, and then went back to school to study ergonomy. She said she was much happier now designing gardens and that her business was becoming successful.

Y. said it was her first time traveling alone. She had gone to Keukenhof that morning to see the tulips, but when she arrived it was grey and raining and all the flowers were dead. There had been a heat wave the week before, she said, and all the people there had taken advantage of it and died.

Y. said she doesn't smoke marijuana often, but felt like it after what had happened.

I told Y. about what I was. She interrupted to tell me that I was acting the way I "felt" I was when I was happiest. I was being a little bit of a show-off, I was being a little from 10th grade, when I was presenting a science project on electrical conductivity involving a battery and a lightbulb and copper wires, and how I was interrupted by both my teacher and my classmates who told me I was wrong.

Y. and I were getting along very well and the time was passing quickly. We all left the coffee shop and went to a bar near our hostel. The other guy from the hostel who had come with us had to wake up early for a flight to his home. The man my friend said he was ready for bed, but he was drunk the night. It was all of a sudden just Y. and me alone.

She was talking about the abstract paintings she makes, how they often end up looking like microscopic images of sperm and eggs, which she was referring to as "microscopic images of life." She said that she had an extensive anecdote about a friend of hers who had come to Amsterdam several years before and how this friend was certain she was a reincarnation of Spinoza, who did spend time in Amsterdam, which this friend only knew because she saw it on a plaque.

I was very taken with all of this and with Y. and was happily and unbearably and unselfconsciously paddling along to the rhythm of our conversation.

The bar closed, we went for a walk through the red light district, and we eventually found ourselves in a room of my hostel. "The Hostel" as we called it, where many a stressed young traveler has spent his or her entire time in Amsterdam, wasted on the couch. Floating on the soporific clouds of legalized marijuana.

We talked and we kissed and we fooled. It was 2:30 in the morning. She was going to be in Amsterdam for a couple of more days. About half-a-day longer than I was.

I walked her to her train stop. She stopped me as we passed through an alley and we kissed.

I left for the U.S. the next day. I'd no idea how old I was. She guessed correctly: I asked her how old she was. She said 27. She gave me her business card, which was in Hebrew, and did not have an email address. We said goodbye, and I returned to the hostel and went to bed.

The next day was our last in Amsterdam. My friend and I had a flight the following morning at 7:00AM, and would have to leave our hostel at 4:00AM for the airport from there, we would return to Spain, and I would spend one last Madrid, one night in Madrid, and then fly home to the U.S.

My friend and I walked through the city with no particular plans and little ambition to do anything. It was cloudy and cool and we were content to sit in the park and smoke pot and to do little else. Around 3:00 PM, we decided it was time to bring our friend back home. My friend's hostel back home would be proud. However, I felt melancholy and was not speaking much, and then began listening to Sufjan rock music on my MP3 player.

My friend and I gathered our belongings and left our hostel. I LEFT MY MP3 PLAYER ON THE COUCH IN The Vortex, and that I would tune in on bay to the front desk and retrieve our deposit before going to bed.

I sat in the common room, but then felt like going for a walk. I passed the bar where Y. and I had talked. It's where I had seen her for the last time. I walked through the coffee shop where we met and sat down in the same seat as before. It was late, but without thinking I ordered a latte. I was writing in my journal about what had happened with Y.

I finished my latte and my magic mark a lot of coffee, looked up, and saw Y. walk into the coffee shop.

We talked and kissed until the shop closed at 11:00PM. She then asked if I wanted go to her hotel room. I said, "Oh." I at first first I had to return the key to my hostel and I thought I should wait for her in the entrance of the coffee shop.

I hurried to the hostel, hooked with a touch of pity of my fellow young travelers, then hurried back to the coffee shop.

Y. was there, waiting.

We walked over the canals and to her hotel. When we got there, the front entrance was locked, with a sign saying, "Back in 10 minutes." We sat and waited, and waited. After half-an-hour, the proprietor returned and opened the front door.

We went up to her room. She took a shower and told me to sit on the bed and wait.

Just as we were about to begin, Y. asked if I had a condom, which I didn't, and neither did she. She said, for when she was in her cycle, she probably wouldn't get pregnant, and I was relieved to hear that. She then tentatively asked if there was anything, "normal," she should be concerned with about me. I told her probably not, seeing as it was my first time.

When she heard that the grimaced, but she seemed relieved to hear it.

It was very passionate and also patient with me when I was being hesitant or awkward.

An hour or so later, it was 3:00AM, and my friend would be waking up at 4:00AM for our flight. I asked Y. if I could stay the night, but she said I could not for to get to the door and knock exactly when he was waking up, and he would let me in and not know the difference.

Y. and I said goodbye, again, and exchanged email addresses. I walked back to the hostel, woke up the hostel and arrived exactly as my friend's alarm was ringing. He let me in, I changed my clothes, nestled my bags, and we left.

We hurried to the train station - my despite hour - and we made our train in time, and we arrived at the airport with extra time to spare.

I was being cast towards my friend and didn't tell him what happened. I think I was in shock. I looked out to the tarmac as the sun was rising and replayed my conversation with Y. in my head. I felt like I had dreamed and like if I do close my eyes, I'll wake up back in my hotel room some spontaneity and some passion and some joy.

Within a few days, I was back in the suburbs of Chicago and Y. was in the suburbs of Tel Aviv. I mailed her a very long letter and a very long email. Y. wrote back, and we began a long-distance relationship. We talked her and two frequently. My idle plans to return to Europe or anywhere near Israel never came to too, and Y. has never come anywhere near America.

Y. and I still exchange emails, and it's still going well, and we still talk about how we'd like to visit each other again, but I do not know where, or when, or what it will feel like.

S.

I met S. during a philosophy lecture I was giving at a university in Argentina, in the tiny city of Paraná. I had a great time in Argentina, and I had fallen in love in Santa Rita province and near Uruguay, as an assistant to the English Department for eight months. I had given two previous public lectures but both had been in English, and I was hoping I wanted to try and give one in Spanish as well.

The lecture was about this sub-genre of science fiction literature, the stories of which are about male protagonists who are in love with female robots or artificial worlds - by space aliens or the government or a corporation or robots, and how the liberation of these protagonists always involves the promise of romance and love and on the other side, our in the metaphysically-solid real world.

Before the lecture began, I was speaking with one of my English students who was in the audience. I noticed another one of my students enter, along with a very attractive, dark, and dark-haired girl.

I had been in Argentina for six months at that point and my attempts at romance had not gone well, often ending in frustration and in once case in Buenos Aires, very deep and disturbing humiliation.

I was not looking for a relationship or for anything like a real relationship or felt anything more than romance-wise than lust. I was worrying me to think that I could no longer write off my sentimental detachments as just a phase of being a kid.

I was not looking for a relationship, however, in that the longer I went without experiencing what's involved in a serious relationship, of what happens once the passion cools but you become more secure and intimate with each other - the more intimidating it would be if and when I ever did hook up with someone who I felt I could be married that seriously.

Regardless, I was having a really wonderful time during this grant. I was learning more Spanish and exploring a new part of the world. The city I was living in was friendly and charming, the people I met were so overwhelmed by my interest, the interest that I felt like I was getting to see life as Argentines lived it for themselves, and not as a self-conscious and glamorized presentation for visitors.

My days of teaching done, I was free to explore almost every day, and I only took me a few minutes to walk from my apartment to the downtown. I was reading several books at once and filling up notebooks and writing long letters by hand to friends back home in America or off in Europe or Asia or other parts of South America.

I was happy with my solitude, but I could hear some notes of dread underneath the daily bliss. The dread was that the logical conclusion of this lifestyle was to commit myself to a life of intellectual dilettantism.

There was a line in "The Stone of Madness" that really got to me, when Harry is dying in the sanatorium during his suicide but yet yes "feel the rotten of emptiness in this life of pleasant surrender." The rotten of doing nothing and reading books and watching movies, of losing myself in infinitely convoluted and endlessly indulgent spirals of speculation, of staying in and avoiding others and keeping myself to myself.

So, I was about to begin this lecture when I first saw S. and felt very attracted to her and very flattered and intrigued that she had come to listen to me speak.

I finished the lecture and noticed S. walking towards me. I'd noticed earlier, while talking, about the fine, intelligent, and kind face she had. She had a piece of paper were her book suggestions: "The Trial" by Kafka and "Birth of the Prison" by Foucault.

I learned later in Nov or that late S. had just broken up with a long-term boyfriend and dropped out of her program at the Sorbonne to come to Argentina and study in Argentina and in a prestigious public school that's older than Harvard.

S. was from a farmtown in the center of Entre Ríos province and returned to Paraná to be close to her family and to be with her boyfriend, who was from there.

A few days after the lecture, I received a text message for an unknown number saying that the talk I gave was nice and asking if there were going to be any others, and that her name was S. Her name translated to English, I wondered, was Sunshine. I wondered, incredulously, if this could have been the same beautiful and mysterious girl who had handed me the scrap of paper.

I wrote back saying I wasn't planning on giving any more lectures, but that I would be more than happy sometime to talk, but that I had to leave for a week because my family was visiting. I asked that student of mine what the name was of the girl he had come with to the lecture. He said her name was S.

I felt like I was being tested in some way. I had exactly eight weeks left before my flight home to Chicago. Romantically, I was in no mood to take things slowly or to be patient.

I met S., then invited her to my apartment to have a drink and to listen to music.

When she came into my room she dashed to my bookshelf like a beggar to a buffet. She removed from her purse a Spanish translation of Raymond Carver stories called, "Si me necesitas, llámame." I opened the book and read the title of the story. S. read the original surface on the pages of her books.

We drank, we talked. S. didn't speak English and said she had no desire to learn. She was living in a girls' pension only two blocks from my apartment. She said she was very lonely and was considering leaving, that she had been doing in Córdoba, but now wanted to study Hispanic literature in Paraná.

She said her dream was to move to Paris. When she said that I felt like I was looking at a girl who had the same dream, and I felt like I was looking at a very artistically prolific and spectacly seductive woman. I was turned on and intimidated and left with hope that she wasn't in Paris yet and that I still had a chance.

It was getting late and S. was receiving my phone calls and messages from her family and was in a ghastly mood and if perhaps we were not going to click. I finally just asked if I could kiss her. She looked at me, repeated the question back, and then we spent the night together.

The next day there was a violent thunderstorm - it was late spring - and the power went out for several hours. S. was at a birthday party of a cousin and I invited her to come by when it was over. At midnight, while the rain had temporarily stopped, she came over and we spent the night together listening to the thunder and lightning and the back winds of a storm.

S. knew how little time I had remaining in Argentina. I asked her if she wanted to travel with me south to Patagonia, that I would pay for everything. She said she was flattered, but that she was too poor to protestor and wouldn't want her taking a break from her job search.

S. was receiving some money from this brother and from her father, but she was struggling, living off of about 1,000 U.S. dollars a month. She had a part-time job as a tutor and was hoping to find another, which seems to be in exchange of the title, and where we stated a bare that her uncle-lands.

While we were there, S. and I had a big lunch with her aunt and uncle, went for a walk and made love in a four-star and stole, and I felt like I was a kept boy, a sugar daughter, sleep and food in exports to a pack of dogs and a cat.

S. came with me to Buenos Aires the weekend before my flight home. She did never visit a cemetery, but she did visit the Recoleta Cemetery, which I had never seen the ocean. The only previous time she had been to the city was for a brief visit in elementary school.

We had many fights and she threatened to return home early several times that weekend, but by Saturday night, we had reached a day to go for we, she relaxed and we enjoyed ourselves.

We went to a screening of "Network" at the Museo MALBA. We went to the zoo. We ate charipan and ice cream. We easily love one last time.

S. and I had a long-distance relationship after I left the Depot, and for her to go to the bus station I saw one rear drip down S.'s cheek from behind her sunglasses as we sat in the taxi. It was the only time I saw her cry.

I wept as I was boarding my shuttle and saying goodbye to my friends, and I felt like I was a fool to get on the shuttle and walk out the corner and S.

Earlier that afternoon, without telling her, I had put my cell phone into her purse, hoping she could sell it for money but thinking she would refuse if I had upsetting given it to her.

After my flight to the States, I was waiting in Houston to connect to Chicago. I checked my email and saw S. had written. She said when she got to bus station, she sat down and ordered a drink and began to cry. When she texted me to say goodbye one more time, I felt like I had ruined her.

For as much as I was beginning to feel deeply for S., I also felt the time wasn't right for us to be together romantically, that she had to get her degree and that I had to start my life as a career for myself, which I could only do in the U.S.

We've kept in touch, but inconsistently. I think of her very dearly, and can only hope that she will be able to graduate, which is difficult in the at a Latin American university, and that she will be able to visit me the next time she does I will have a career going and will be ready to leave the U.S. again and that we could be ready to love each other, as something like adults.

THE AUTHOR

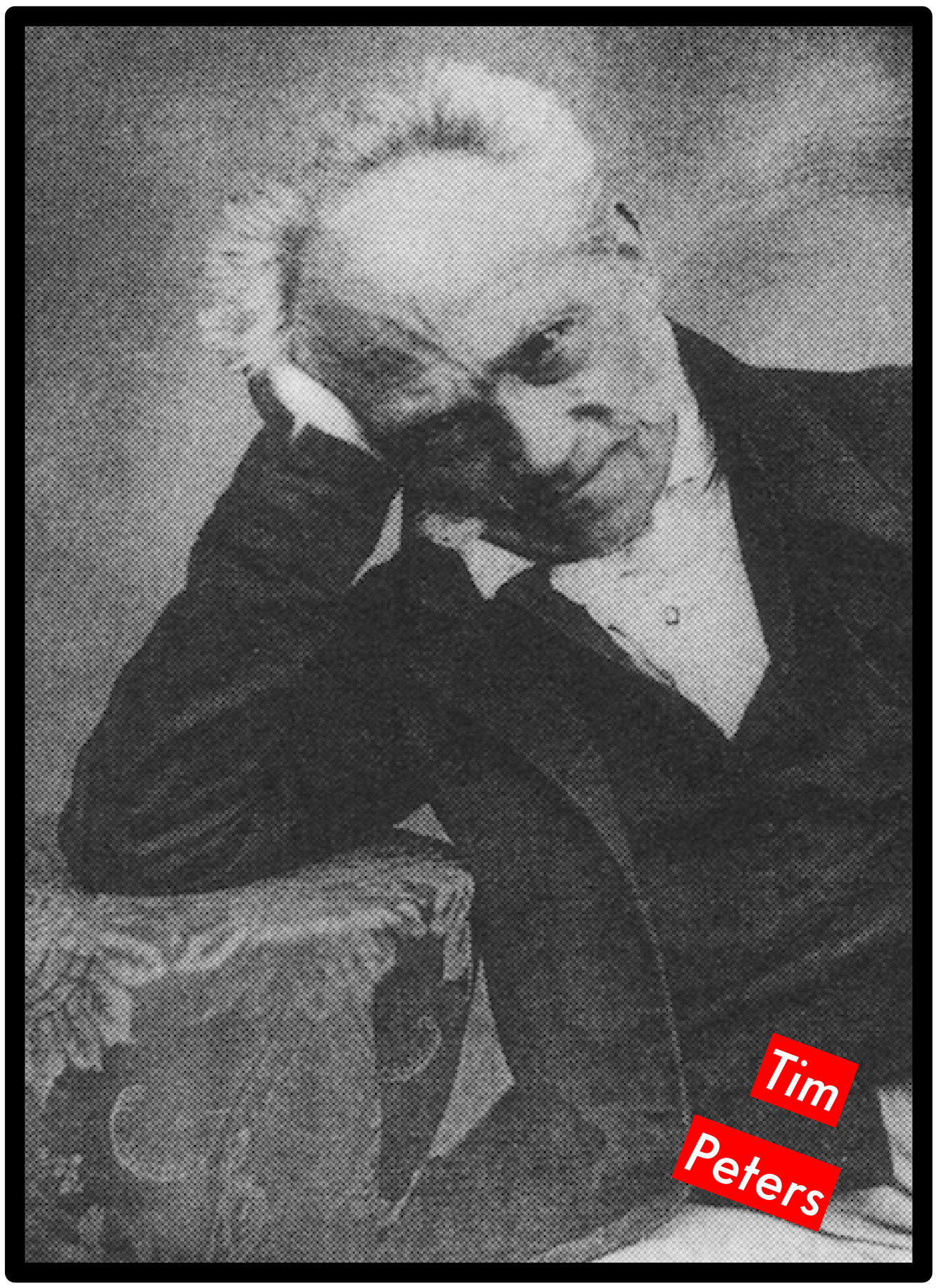
"IT IS A VOLUPTUOUS DELUSION WHICH LEADS A MAN TO BELIEVE THAT HE WILL FIND A GREATER PLEASURE IN THE ARMS OF A WOMAN WHOSE BEAUTY APPEALS TO HIM THAN IN THOSE OF ANY OTHER, OR WHICH . . . FIRMLY CONVINCES HIM THAT HER POSSESSION WILL AFFORD HIM BOUNDLESS HAPPINESS. ACCORDINGLY, HE IMAGINES HE IS MAKING EFFORTS AND SACRIFICES FOR HIS OWN ENJOYMENT, WHEREAS HE IS DOING SO MERELY FOR THE MAINTENANCE OF THE REGULAR AND CORRECT TYPE OF THE SPECIES."

WITH VERY WEARY REGARD FOR,

AND IN SINCERE REPLY TO,

HIS UNRELENTING PESSIMISM,

AND INSISTENT DISGUST WITH LIFE



"OPTIMISM IS NOT ONLY A FALSE BUT ALSO A PERNICIOUS DOCTRINE, FOR IT PRESENTS LIFE AS A DESIRABLE STATE AND MAN'S HAPPINESS AS ITS AIM AND OBJECT. STARTING FROM THIS, EVERYONE THEN BELIEVES HE HAS THE MOST LEGITIMATE CLAIM TO HAPPINESS AND ENJOYMENT. IF, AS USUALLY HAPPENS, THESE DO NOT FALL TO HIS LOT, HE BELIEVES THAT HE SUFFERS AN INJUSTICE, IN FACT THAT HE MISSES THE WHOLE POINT OF HIS EXISTENCE; WHEREAS IT IS FAR MORE CORRECT TO REGARD WORK, PRIVATION, MISERY, AND SUFFERING, CROWNED BY DEATH, AS THE AIM AND OBJECT OF OUR LIFE (AS IS DONE BY BRAHMANISM AND BUDDHISM, AND ALSO BY GENUINE CHRISTIANITY), SINCE IT IS THESE THAT LEAD TO THE DENIAL OF THE WILL-TO-LIVE."

THE WORLD AS

WILL AND

REPRESENTATION

"FOR OBVIOUSLY THE CARE WITH WHICH AN INSECT HUNTS FOR A PARTICULAR FLOWER, OR FRUIT, OR DUNG, OR MEAT...AND TO ATTAIN THIS DOES NOT SHIRNK FROM TROUBLE OR DANGER, IS VERY ANALOGOUS TO THE CARE WITH WHICH A MAN SPECIALLY SELECTS FOR SEXUAL SATISFACTION A WOMAN WITH QUALITIES THAT APPEAL TO HIM INDIVIDUALLY. HE STRIVES AFTER HER SO EAGERLY THAT, TO ATTAIN THIS END, HE OFTEN, IN DEFIANCE OF ALL REASON, SACRIFICES HIS OWN HAPPINESS IN LIFE BY A FOOLISH MARRIAGE, BY LOVE-AFFAIRS THAT COST HIM HIS FORTUNE, HIS HONOR, AND HIS LIFE, EVEN BY CRIMES, SUCH AS ADULTERY OR RAPE; ALL MERELY IN ORDER TO SERVE THE SPECIES IN THE MOST APPROPRIATE WAY, IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE WILL OF NATURE THAT IS EVERYWHERE SUPREME, ALTHOUGH AT THE EXPENSE OF THE INDIVIDUAL."

"AWAKENED TO LIFE OUT OF THE NIGHT OF UNCONSCIOUSNESS, THE WILL FINDS ITSELF AS AN INDIVIDUAL IN AN ENDLESS AND BOUNDLESS WORLD, AMONG INNUMERABLE INDIVIDUALS, ALL STRIVING, SUFFERING, AND ERRING; AND, AS IF THROUGH A TROUBLED DREAM, IT HURRIES BACK TO THE OLD UNCONSCIOUSNESS. YET TILL THEN ITS DESIRES ARE UNLIMITED, ITS CLAIMS INEXHAUSTIBLE, AND EVERY SATISFIED DESIRE GIVES BIRTH TO A NEW ONE. NO POSSIBLE SATISFACTION IN THE WORLD COULD SUFFICE TO STILL ITS CRAVING, SET A FINAL GOAL TO ITS DEMANDS, AND FILL THE BOTTOMLESS PIT OF ITS HEART."

DESIRING AND LOVING

Schopenhauer is willing to admit that love is important and worth thinking about (which most philosophers refuse to do), but yet his view on love is still quite cynical. Schopenhauer's perspective is that, we're slaves to a species mandate that has nothing to do with humanity or civilization or culture, but instead just turning the crank and producing generation upon generation of fresh bodies.

Freud's view of Schopenhauer's thoughts on love are totally accurate - though they do agree in many ways with a scientific, evolutionary explanation - he does seem right in pointing out how lust and desire can be disastrous and make us behave like maniacs.

Love can be a powerful distraction, a chance on the most important affairs, interrupts work from the most serious occupations, and sometimes perplexes for a while even the greatest minds. It does not hesitate to intrude with its trash, and to interfere with the negotiations of statesmen and the investigations of sages. It often leaves none to ship has never sent its tracks of burn even into ministerial portfolios and philosophical manuscripts. Every day it knows and hatches the worst and most perplexing quarrels and disputes. destroys the most beneficial relations, and breaks the strongest bonds. .it robs all of innovation, hinds most the prompted honorable and upright, and makes traitors of those who have hitherto been loyal and faithful. Accordingly, it appears on the whole as a malevolent demon, striving to prevent, to confuse, and to overthrow at every turn.

Schopenhauer's view is very similar to the philosopher who viewed at romance and thought of it practically, as irrational and debasing and ultimately harsh.

Ortega y Gasset wrote, "The soul of a man in love needs all the sound up more of a cold man - its confined atmosphere is filled with stale breath."

Stendhal compared love to tossing a twig down into a salt mine, where it would become coated with crystals, "with a galaxy of scintillating diamonds," such that, "I could see the object which I had given up for lost as a changed and dazzlingly embellished version of him or her."

Simone de Beauvoir found the gender roles of "romantic" relationships to be seriously biased against women. She said that, "Love is the only domain in which a woman can be claimed. .the preaches to women that she should give and her gifts know him to be distinction."

While Emma Goldman called marriage, "that poor little Church-and-State-together-weak" and felt that if love existed, it was in spite of, not thanks to, being married.

There's also just as many examples in literature of how romantic love brings out the worst in us.

Nietzsche wrote, "Every great love brings with it so much bad blood of killing the object of that love, that it would be a miracle if it were not a crime." Nietzsche felt that of change for love dreads change more than it does destruction.

How many famous stories are just variations on this related theme? There are the jealous young lovers of "Romeo and Juliet" or "Tristan and Isolde," there's the psychotic painter from Poe's "The Oval Portrait" or Hawthorne's "Rappaccini's Daughter" or "Rappaccini's Daughter," the jealousy-driven murder of the young lovers when he wrote: "But this is what young people are - we often could do absolutely wrong in doing they lacks by their very nature are impatient Ring. Romeo and Juliet, before they have lived long enough to be able to know what they want, have fallen into madness, disorder, bewilderment. And what can happen then? What can life do with this heap of half-broken things that they call their conscience and that they would like to call their happiness? Is it even possible, and that - I ask you, Friar, you who are a priest and a man - and poverty, and the savage sins one of the many connections that have sprout up in great cities like public shelters on this most dangerous road."

One of these commitments-acquaintances for the sake of love, is the loss of personal security, like the character of "Story of the Eye" or "Eyes Wide Shut," or the S&M of "Venus in Furs" or "In the Realm of the Senses," or any of the many, many perversions from the films of Pedro Almodóvar and Luis Buñuel.

Love can also be a chance to endure change and time, there's always the possibility of domestic hell, like in Yung Chai's doomed story "Forever Amber Beauty" or "Husbands and Wives."

But, but, but! Love is also this is look at him and romantic ideal of pulling, as the perfect gentleman or natural question and reason desire and as a means to freedom and fulfillment.

The same two theorists from above did also think highly of love, or at least a certain ideal and uncommon form of love.

Goldman wrote, "Some day, some day men and women will rise, they will reach the mountain peak. they will meet big and strong and free, ready to receive, to partake, and to bask in the golden rays of love. .If the day comes, and it will come, it will be ushered in by women, not men-kings, but kings will be the parents."

While de Beauvoir wrote, "For the one and the other, love would be manifestation of freedom, of the gift of self and enrichment of the world. .neither would give up transcendence and freedom for the sake of another; they would another realizes and aims in the world."

This is a heroic view of how love could transform and revitalize us. It's similar to what Rilke was aiming at when he wrote: "For one human being to love another human being - that is perhaps the most difficult task of all, the ultimate task, the final test and proof, the work for which all other work is merely preparation. It is a high inducement for the individual to ripen, to become something in himself, to become world, to become himself in order for the sake of another person, to be great. .everything that is a love something that chooses him and calls him to vast distances. Only in this sense, as the task of watching over themselves I've learnt and to hammer day and night I, may young people are for each other, good and beautiful."

This idea of love as a chance to be heroic is probably not too intellectually distant from what Socrates says in Plato's "Symposium" in which love is a means through which we can reach perfection and true Beauty and true Virtue.

Love can be a chance to transcend time, to be heroic, to be a means to freedom and fulfillment. But, the love itself - the feelings, the sensations, the emotions - can get distracted or just overwhelmed, and, the lover can get discarded if he or she is not tough enough, not neutral enough, not self-contained enough. Love can be a chance to be heroic, to be a means to freedom, but there's the of rugged individuality, of having to hammer of one's existence "day and night."

There's rarely a line in literature against steady domestic love, as the essence of that kind of love is to be steady and to be domestic. Romance is rarely material for theater or novels or cinema. Albeit, when domesticated love is repetitious, it occurs not over a few wedding weeks or months, but over years and decades, within a fairly quiet home. Most literature deals with unique and extraordinary events, and so, most literature and most celebrated literature shows one unusual in that they can show the rarecoloss of domestic, enduring, steady love. Just look at the many moments of beautiful, steady love in Jane Austen's Mansfield Park.

Lastly, there's Homer's epic the temptations of Mindy, Siemens or Lorlene Lumpkin, or when Munge rejects Jacques the bowling instructor. Or when Homer returns to his job at nuclear plant in order to make ends meet after Maggie is born. Or when Marge forgives Homer for his gambling addiction and for his lack of a job and his sub-sub-educated status. Or when Homer walks out of Moe's bar to spend the evening with Marge after his month of abstinence.

The love between Marge and Homer seems like a chance to be heroic, to be a means to freedom, as described as "being able truly to care about other people and to sacrifice for them over and over in myriad petty, messy ways every day."

If making sacrifices is essential to being in love and caring about others, then great and the sacrifices bad

In the final scene of the screwball comedy "Bringing Up Baby," Susan, played by Katherine Hepburn, climbs up scaffolding - over an almost-complete dinosaur skeleton - and tells her fiancée, David, to reach Dr. Huxley, played by Cary Grant, the paleontologist she's crazy for.

Susan wants Dr. Huxley to admit his love for her, but as they're talking there's a slip and mayhem and. .the dinosaur falls down. Dr. Huxley, who has been trying unsuccessfully to reach Dr. Huxley, who has been trying unsuccessfully to reach Susan and embrace her.

Is love worth all this? For one's careful, long-term, professional devotion to be shattered? But they're just old movies and romantic comedies, and, they're not serious. Jonathan Franzen's novel Freedom or Tony Gilroy's your arrest. It's like Dr. Huxley is forced into the career a family obligation, and his life career be ruined for the sake of love and family. Though the cynic would say that Huxley's career was ruined anyway, and, that, however, Huxley's career ruined anyway, and, that, however, the passion could he'll regret it and flee back to the dinosaurs.

So, what is the value of love? What is it good for? And of making a love important be able to in any way guide our feelings or help us with our desires?

Love brings us knowledge of our self and others, but often that knowledge is traumatizing and hideous, though sometimes it's enlightened and beautiful.

Love can be a means to freedom, but it's also that only the appetites for food or water can compare.

It makes us stable and complacent, and giving. It makes us work hard and push ourselves to be our best. It makes us do glorious things, to have storied visions, to be guilt-free and to be ecstatic and to be generous. It makes us do what's delicious and what's delicious in the most ugly ways when we shouldn't. It makes us do terrible things, to have grotesque thoughts, to be predators and parasites.

It requires us to confront ourselves as smelly, sweaty, malfunctioning-at-times meat machines, and, it makes us do fragrant, muscular, pleasure-producing works of art.

I don't know. I've been evaporated and crystallized by love, but it's also blessed and nourished me in other ways. I'm certainly not giving up on it anytime soon. But we'll see.

THINKING AND LIVING

Schopenhauer was a poetically eloquent writer and a viciously insightful thinker. He published the first volume of his book "The World as Will and Representation" when he was only in his late 20's.

And yet, is it worth it to spend so much energy trying to figure out what he meant? Is it worth it to ask how if Schopenhauer's view is correct and if not we are deluded and that everything is more or less meaningless? And is it worth it if the means of developing that interpretation - is academic scholarship, scientific research, philosophical contemplation - are often tedious and boring and dehumanizing?

There's a Walt Whitman poem called "When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer" that seems to deal with this question. It goes:

When I heard the learn'd astronomer,
When the proofs, the figures, were ranged in columns before me,
When I was shown the charts and the diagrams, to add, divide, and measure them,
When I sitting heard the astronomer where he lectured with much applause in the lecture-room,
How soon unaccountable I became tired and sick,
Till rising and gliding out I wander'd off by myself,
In the mysterious moist night-air, and from time to time,
Look'd up in perfect silence at the stars.

The endless analysis and calculations of the astronomer seem to have nothing to do with the sublime and the transcendent. Perhaps, the work of the interpretation of the astronomer may be mathematically exact and logically rigorous, but developing and explaining it just seems to have to be far away from the original shift the interpretation was inspired by and meant for.

Over-thinking, over-analyzing, over-interpreting. The consequences of all this cogitation, when applied particularly to desire and love, can be disastrous and paralyzing in the most fundamental way.

This is the conundrum that's faced by Philip K. Dick's novel, "Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?"

The human detective Deckard is about to have sex with a female android named Rachael. She says to him:

You're not going to bed with a woman. Don't be disappointed, sweet. How can a man made love to an android failure?
I understand - they tell me - it's convincing. If you don't think too much about it. Don't consider. If you reflect on what you're doing - then you can't go on. For obvious physiological reasons.
Remember, though, don't think about it. Just do it. Don't pursue and be philosophical. Sentiment from a philosophical standpoint is always fatal to both.

Rachael is worried that the desire between an android and a human is philosophically "dreary," but yet, if we are willing to be "convinced" by our sex-partners is philosophically dreary, and the dreary interpretation, if you let it get to you, can cripple your capacity to care and can make you impotent in any and every sense.

Rachael's concern is not only about meaning and interpretation, particularly if those interpretations are going to disenchant our sense of the world? Should we just be afraid if we don't have anything nice to say? Just be quiet and grateful and go with the flow?

But, but. for one, asking questions, learning what there is to learn of the world, can be emancipating.

Frederick Douglass, while a young slave, was being taught how to read by his master's wife. The master discovered this and was outraged and yelled at his wife. He said:

Douglass never had his master said "learning would spoil the best nigger in the world. if you teach that nigger (speaking of myself) how to read, there would be no keeping him. It would unfit him to be a slave. I. he should know how to read, he would soon want to read. He would then want to write. It would unfit him to be a slave. I. he should know how to read, he would soon be discontented and unhappy."

There's a sense that, even if our investigations make us "discontented and unhappy," it's worth it, because, even if our interpretations of the world are, we can discover new possibilities of being, new ways to live, new (and hopefully meaningful) things to desire.

Moreover, Wallace wonder, feeling strong curiosity and awe before life and the world is what impels us to ask questions and to try to find a meaning in life. "Reasoning" that wonder is the beginning of philosophy and that it's a feeling that belongs to the philosopher.

The nursery rhyme "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star" shows how one goes from feeling enchantment to asking questions and wanting to investigate:

Twinkle, twinkle, little star
How I wonder what you are
Up above the world so high,
Like a diamond in the sky.

Will this child grow up to become a dull, learn'd astronomer in the lecture-room, or a wandering mystic looking up in perfect silence at the stars?

Wallace's "Twinkle Twinkle" is a longer poem in which he tells the story of a very complicated analysis on the physical constitution of those same stars!

The naturalist John Muir was delighted by plants and animals and was a fierce defender of them, but, ultimately what he was called, "just dotted over his feelings of holiness for the natural world.

He wrote, "Like everybody else I was always fond of flowers, attracted by their external beauty and purity. Now my eyes were opened to their beauty, and all else was for a time forgotten. I was in a new world, a world of love, leading on and on into the infinite cosmos."

Why does Schopenhauer have such a gloomy interpretation of things while Muir has such an ecstatic one?

Why does Schopenhauer have such a cynical and lifeless and constantly expanding (see "Arrive Hub?")? Or are telescopic images of distant galaxies and far-off nebulae so beautiful as to deserve the most sacred and serious gratitude (see "The Face of Life")?

It's easy to pity oneself for being too smart and too insightful and too educated. Byron wrote:

Science is knowledge: they who know the most
Must mourn the deepest o'er the fatal truth
The tree of knowledge is not that of life.

The protagonist in "Good Old Neon" by David Foster Wallace feels this way and he ends up killing himself. But other, like Frederick Douglass' case, being dumb and uneducated means being a slave.

Wallace's solution is a kind of interpretation: "But if you really learn how to pay attention, then you will know there are other options. It will actually be within your power to experience a crowded, hot, slow, consumer-hell type situation as not only meaningful, but sacred, on fire with the presence of God. Or of Love. Or of Allah. Or, the mystical essence of all things deep down."

Wallace says this as if, what makes one an adult is to choose how things mean for you, to choose whether your fundamental view of the world is optimistic and patient or pessimistic and impatient. And yet he, seemingly, was too old to follow his advice.

Cats are like both stoic, steady, lab-dwelling scientists, and also passionate, unpredictable, impressionistic artists. Can we free ourselves from dogma and be like cats? Can we be free and yet still impartial and children? Can we be led by desires and emotions and just let ourselves be, let our ideas flow through through, be logical, and make good, honest decisions?

I don't know. I've been very tired of all the "Should I be a cat or a dog?" questions, and I often wish for a lifestyle that would involve something like more direct, intuitive interaction with other people and the world. I think I have tried to find that context with several relationships, with friendship, with various jobs, but things always seem to end up in a stressful, disorienting and maddeningly slow way to feel failure.

However, to quote Wallace again, I do not know if it was "Then or Just Me," if it was my own expectations and analyses and frequent indisposition towards just letting things be that made the whole thing so stressful, or if it was the circumstances and conversations.

I have felt very antagonized and moved and alive while reading "A Room of One's Own," or "Narcissus and Goldmund," or "Infinite Jest," or "Life on the Mississippi," or "Henry and Zenna," or "Letters to a Young Poet," or "Ulysses," or, consistently enough, "Schopenhauer as Educator."

Or while watching "Husbands and Wives," or, "Inconsoling," or "Nine Dreamers," or "Sherlock, Jr.," or "Gaslen," or "Double Indemnity," or "Goodfellas," or "Cria Cuervos."

Or while listening to "A Ghost in Reno," or "Funeral," or "OK Computer," or a Vivaldi violin concerto or a Bach fugue or a Beethoven symphony.

Or while playing catch with a Frisbee in a group full of people or playing a game of Risk or Scrabble or hiking through a forest, or sitting on the shoulder of a spend.

In those moments, I often feel like I'm being swept up like a fish Moe's momentarily trapped from the water, and those waters for me are the ordinary ocean of ordinary life and ordinary people and I feel like I have had this same feeling while doing things with other people. like in really great conversations or during really good sex. where you and this other person are in harmony and both of you want nothing else but to be in that moment and to be with each other. It's a totally lower ng of self space and time and everything constantly.

But, eventually, you reach a climax and you run out of breath and splash back into the stream of things.

I find it frightening to think that regular adult life seems to be a kind of slow-motion version of those more expansive feelings. And that most adult life seems like one just too tired and too frustrated to do anything else after work but relax and take it easy. Though I suppose the grey, everyday yellow defines by contrast the intense, colorful moments.

Looking from look at Thomas Cole's paintings "The Voyage of Life," the "Childhood" and "Youth" ones are very bright and lush, but "Manhood" and "Old Age" are very dark and desolate. In my life, I've had some true moments of "childhood" and "youth" and I've had some of those dim, some bad OK, and I suppose that's what rule of the quality of my experiences will be as I get older.

I'm not going to give up on life yet, and neither am I going to put away my books yet, either. But we'll see.