

Churchsteeple text

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for Jack Lessard

friend, teacher, composer

- Prolouge -

Sometimes when I look at that church I can sense another time, another place. It might be many things other than what it actually is. There is one like it on Amsterdam and 96th. And perhaps another on 3rd and 126th, but that is not more important than there having been one just like it at some other point in time. Or that it itself might have been right there at some other moment. That it could fold me into its pillared spires and let me observe what it has for so long! All the more so if it might be and have been at that place and that time. For I could then try and find him, who has escaped my imagination for so many years. He who set me on that journey toward Amsterdam. What did he do at eight in the morning? Where did he look for his daily lot and why did he not despair upon never finding it? Bread, sugar, cigarettes. The next game of chance to be had for so little and with the promise of so much gain. Listening to the sounds that shaped his sensibility at any given time, any given place and trying to make sense of it all so courageously. Sense of sound and syllable made even more difficult by the lack of sound and reasonable formation in a place from which he had arrived many years earlier. That time and that place. Foreign sounds and foreign ideals driven into his living daily as one of the chosen many, those who once looked at the church residing beneath the steeple in peaceful anticipation and never peaceful resolve. Awaiting some soft but steady rise into the steeple which looked far off into the sky resolutely. Peering learnedly up to the meeting point and in awe of some linear and tangential possibilities which it inspired. Leading necessarily to the defining system of another space and time, it would mock those who dared doubt the mission to which it pretended, while at the same time casting a nod toward some inevitable futility that lay as its foundation. At that place and time, he might have strolled down by the Hamilton Avenue bridge and perhaps bring his mind to bear upon that morning when he had first arrived into the bay, some child grasping onto the hand of his mentor, paternal intuition sending him on his lifelong journey. Some treadmill of opportunity he would soon learn it was, if not imperfect then free from the deprecatory glances of the darker class. Secular endeavour unyielding to the church and steeple whose irony he was at a loss to comprehend. But only after many years when he was to father a child and again his child would he sit and stare upwards at the steeple that caught his eye as he one day awaited routinely on his own, now of fourth generation. Pointed resolve dissolving into pointed guilt for his having abandoned the promised land. And finding himself once again among the stifling pillars of archaic reason. Cold and barren as some stone drearily, looking upwards again towards the painted dome and trying to spy through some stained glass the steeple which appears so seductively from without. And when his own child peers upwards innocently, never hoping to understand the labours which they had put forth unselfishly, he breaks down the languid demeanour which is his own and sobs pathetically. Trying to imagine that place and that time. Bread, sugar, cigarettes. What might have been his daily lot? Or back further still, across the great chasm between who we should be now and what we were then. Did the little boy ever look up at that steeple and wonder why the sky seemed to appear so? Why some mist gathered anxiously into great clouds of colours and shapes, at times obscuring the churning blue while at other times not? At times revealing some softest yearning of the jaded class and at other times not? Sometimes questioning, other times peering into some wayward band of light within which one might be carried off to some distant star

and look back toward oneself in pity? Or why it sometimes seemed to move with the greatest of urgency toward some chosen destination while at others be presiding patiently over those who would choose not to pick themselves up off the pavement residing willingly and unrepentantly? Feeling nothing but sorrow for their ageing souls and regret for opportunities lost, their eyes cast downward toward some least of all possibilities and never looking up in sudden awareness of just how easy is the escape into one's own shining light. The guardian of their own destiny reaches out to some most distant cloud and continues on toward the essence of her beauty. Chastened by that single moment of inspiration one could be made to rise above their own soiled existence. Church...Steeple...Sky... These the little boy might never have considered in his rush to toss the next stone, and when upon spying its insatiable need to return from above sit thoughtfully. Again looking upwards at the steeple and feeling sure that he too might one day reach so high. Far, far off into some other place decorated with candy canes and baseball caps and bursting with the promise of a new order, some sound moral fibre reckoned solely by man's own being man. He was years away from understanding why that stone returned so wantingly. Would he too return indefinitely? Or was it some easy metaphor for that governing principle which defines cyclically the events throughout which history unfolds? A uniquely defining principle not defining at all, but merely some individual weakness, lack of character and constitution? There would always be inexplicable attractions to reckon with. Those between places and people, and feelings drawing one to or away from certain situations and commitments. Where need one look to acquire those tools for peering into the future and knowing the proper path? Teaching to touch upon one's own sense of foresight had become the child's destiny. Oh, but how poorly I have learned! The steeple is clear and decided in its chosen way, a fact even the little boy could perceive with his innocent gaze, yet seeming to know all the while that in its brazen determination would be found some means toward the redemption of many generations to come.

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Jim sat looking at the pavement. He would like to have gone to spend some time at that breakfast place on Serrano but could not bear the thought of having to let on that he, too, had been caught up in the language school scam — *vergonzoso* is what the newspapers said. Learning should be a worthy exercise, one to be shielded from those who would have it yield so easily to whim. Jim could not help but recall that even the tritest of ventures had been required to bear the seal. Those in the East Village displaying that nod of approval proudly for which they had toiled so long and hard. Years of poring over the tools and disciplines which might send one off either happily or scurrying hurriedly past the eatery windows toward some nearest refuge within which to redefine oneself. All the while bemoaning some lack of sound formation which had caught them unwittingly, for a much needed requirement it was. And if upon riding the Lexington Avenue northbound and past one's destination to almost Amsterdam, one might hail a crosstown and come round full circle to the place of their endowment. His own endowment. Sitting for hours and listening to the dearest voices. Some time gone by and still being, flutes and rapturous voice rising slowly into one's own consciousness. Jim would sit staring at the clock on the library wall just above the librarian's mantel. Stark and unforgiving as its second hand ticked off the spending moments of his youth. Such was the one to take hold of, to listen to the *maestros* and make them his, strings and voices beneath some thunderous ovation of quiet

desperation. The jaded class would become his to change or fashion as he saw fit. Some right bequeathed him by they who had crossed on while looking back at the darkness, following some perfect pitch across the divide between what we should be now and what we were then. It would take years and then more years and time to bring to fruition all that he had inherited, placingly and square upon his own laden shoulders. Jim's teachers had been amongst the finest. He might nonetheless occasionally wonder as to the legitimacy of one's time being spent, still unknowing of some fairly future erosion of one's own youthful desire to enlighten. How quickly it would all come to pass! And so it seemed to Jim that he might have indeed found some proper path, until then seeking out one fair slightly figure, sure to ill-provide and this he might have liked to believe. Scholarship again coming back and holding on in desperation would tend to wantonly dissolve some white platinum hair length offering, scent of fresh flower sweetly carried over from some other place. Wary cliffs looking off from the Palisades might be telling of Jim's own dilemma as he approached the completion of his insipid daily pilgrimage, for it was from there that she had been long initiating some desperate calling out to Jim. Stepping off onto the subway platform would provide him one last chance for reconsideration. Climbing upwards on 136th St. and past some cheap urban hotel settlingly reminded of the opportunities which needed to be gotten hold of. Some scarcity of people and ideas, creativity disappearing and taunting Jim did tease one into the confines of what would become some lifelong embrace. Universities trying to find refuge within some past ideal would liken Jim to the very earthen stone from which Amsterdam had been built. Endless sun-filled cover over some hard-pressed curriculum would comfort Jim more than she who might complement the warm spring day into which he had placed all hope and desire. Unable to convince Jim that his was some wayward turn, laying a gentle hand upon some tired music remunerations hopefully endured and oblivious to all that the real world would eventually refuse to reconcile. Sounds and tones inspiringly of some other lost age, but now long forgotten and could overly extend this purely academic exercise. The harmonies which Jim had intoned would soon vanish down the cauldrons of some silent abyss. Still he would remain faithful to the proper calling, sound formation providing comfort to the weary historical shift that he would be destined to endure.

Jim chose instead to go over to the head office in hope of recovering some of the back pay he was due. Stevenson had said that she would just as soon sell her wares *ad hoc* rather than have to put up with those misers up north. They were all just *shite* according to her and tried to persuade Jim not to stay on any longer after they appointed dragon lady to head the district. But time breeds complacency and such breeds laziness, whereby Jim could not see any point in trying to revive what had died some time ago. A spirit spent through years of personal neglect and unintendedly at that. Going forward everyday into what would eventually become some flaccid exercise of body and frame come about, tender findings sometimes alighting beneath some still softer grammar of verbs and phrases mingled hurriedly. Jim would not know what was to be on his headway plate until ascending some subway stairs to street level at which cars and human form become joined in some dreary and time worn challenge. Some briefest of journeys would have lasted slightly longer than that to which he had regularly been accustomed, some wayward troupe ne'er innocuous musicianship hampering the sliding doors at station upon station and finally hardly earning enough to fill the coffers for even one more slice of Spanish sustenance. Did anyone ever manage to get ahead for themselves, wringing hands longingly at first but then lamentingly and not wanting to when all was said? Some recurring nightmare with each rising sun and usually emerging at some difficult place? Jim would usually have to struggle to negotiate some proper

line. And barely achieved, hurrying at first but then walkingly while venturing some daring glance at the international suites undoubtedly occupied by such whose careers had taken some different turn. Sellers of dubious reputation, soldiers of fortune caught up in some whirlpool of continental competition. He would walk straight on or first off to the side and around the potted plants adornedly, false reassurance to the staff within, watching and listening for that hour of being on one's own — *hasta mañana*. Then years of having had put himself up to matinal review, being passed on like some long overdue piece of furniture whose delivery date had been pending. There upon reaching the second floor, Jim would sit patiently, thinking through the steps which would lead him to some eventual release and temporary life blood. Awaiting all the while that moment of subtle poetry, gentle redemption which oversaw some rising swell of intolerable confusion. Some lone cello singing out to the little ones, calling and prodding inexhaustibly amid missed opportunity, syntax frustrated by some overall yearning for just intercourse. Sitting across from those who might have been his most beloved audience, Jim had delivered some inane exaltation day in and day out. And although eventually bringing itself to bear in another place, he had been certain that one day it would all come crashing down in some sea of corporate satisfaction — *ladrones y sinvergüenzas*. Jim had arrived to the opposing shore with the idea of pressing on with his teaching career. While he had been of modest value back home, he was made to feel somewhat of a nuisance over here and quickly became the object of many an unscrupulous character's search for inexpensive employ. Jim signed on to his first of many at 800 pesetas an hour. Catching the Number 7 train crosstown would deliver him to the Barrio de la Concepción, a quite faceless conundrum of medium-sized apartment buildings and office blocks. Señorita washing her sidewalk of unwanted debris as the little ones trot on home for lunch — *comida mediterranea*. Jim himself would often get a bite before having to begin. Some unpleasant odour of rancid oil had not yet begun to dissuade him from the occasional repast. While always asking for the same, he inevitably imagined much more. Two pieces of bread between which some delicate completeness had always to be revealed. Whether it had been at John's Diner or that less flamboyant place on Grand Ave., Jim would always come away with some latent satisfaction and expectantly of the next. Delicate completeness. Some hint of the sublime together with just the right dash of mayonnaise and *dijón*, over which the gardenest fresh leaf of lettuce were to be carefully set. He would delight in some variety which he had been afforded, one which presented itself freely, wholeheartedly and unexpectedly in some constant whirlwind of feast and flavour. Jim learned to go without such matter-of-factness at the *cervecería* but could never get used to the actual *bocadillo*, as if it were some understatement of our own lack of resourcefulness or ineptitude of spirit. Still, one was usually treated with the quiet dignity often alluded to, though empty and fraught with some false promise of psychic remuneration. Oh, yes. And some music from another time and place but mostly another place eeking out of some scratchy speaker placed slightly above the top shelf of an entire generation's morning delight. Just a drop in some gilded cup of coffee, or often taken *aparte* in stoic accompaniment to the dawn's first light. Some different tongue charring the minds of many but usually just covering the walls with unsensational strips of bland three-by-five. Upon which to display some everyday chatter, it all dissolved inevitably into one giant cacophony of sound and syllable squandered uncaringly. Going off far into another mind, Jim might momentarily forget about the lunch in front of him and consider if the boy, too, had felt his speech suffering undeservedly under the yoke, compromised so by overreach and insinuation. A latin verse calling to his imagination, he who had looked up at the steeple and, even then, continued looking far beyond the

meeting point in order to subdue some last vestige of from where he would have come. For upon arriving into the bay on that morning, he would have had surely found his dialect to be one in small regard. Some once and still eloquent echo of beauty pushed aside in disregard unwittingly but nonetheless, as if listening to his father issue some last few utterances in that increasingly distant tongue. But what is one's own manner of speaking if not merely some means for moving toward a useful goal, some way of finding out who and where we are and what we should or could be doing? The little boy would soon reject his present murmurings. To emerge anew amid reason and practicality, better prepared to confront the details which often dictate our own waking hours. Bread, sugar, cigarettes. In a new street, on some different corner to that on which his father would have bought him toys and sweets. *Gelato per il ragazzo, signore*. But only in the hope that such trapping, like the idiom itself, would merely serve as some bridge to what he could become. Church...Steeple...Sky... The meeting point between who we were then and what we should be now. Between a race bound by sound and syllable and one unfettered, that is to say, only by the demands that our fellow man places upon fellow man.

Jim had never been initially too keen on entering the office building in the Barrio de la Concepción. Its façade was stark and forbidding, some black marble set against square meters of concrete and gratuitous vegetation. Once inside the revolving doors, one was immediately desensitized by yet more marble, rising in great columns on either side and framing great panes of glass which seemed to inspire envy in the substantial piece of corporate humanity that happened to face it everyday. But places and situations did not always demand as much sacrifice as Jim might have originally expected, and he would often enjoy the short lift to the eighth floor. He normally arrived just upon most re-entering after lunch hour, so the elevators were usually crowded and Jim would be taken upon to eavesdrop on the moral tales which presented themselves. At times he would be thrown into some temporary state of translucent stupor, as if transformed into that poet who spent some considerable time transfixedly upon his own grey sock and under the influence of some strange narcotic taken daily in staunch dose. Scent of stale tobacco and iridescent shades of the scantily perfumed yawned at him encouragingly, animating him on to the next second, and the next until his upward journey was complete. Waning moments with brow furrowed by his lack of command, challenged without respite by those teasing him with other than his own mother tongue. Jim would press back against the back of the lift while laying canvass to some tender mass into which each syllable seemed to penetrate, one by one slowly in a rush of foreign grammar. Words and gentle pressure of sounds and smells all joined into the sensation that seemed to escape him always. And how could they not? After all, his experience was not theirs, nor might he wish it to be. Pure tones ringing out in unselfconscious disregard, some climaxing on the swells which seemed to ignore the very audience for whom they were intended. Some steadfast bell dissipating under a much wider sky whose blue Jim could almost touch under the moistened fabric of some late afternoon's gentle shower. Incipient chatter about this or that, leading to nothing except Jim's personal vindication of what was left behind and where he should be going. Then at once caught up in some disorienting vacuum of fading conversation, some space suddenly gained through the withdrawal of those well come up to. Jim would find new breadth in his role as disinterested observer, and feel having had been completely served by some lukewarm stream of petty revelation which had accompanied him to the eighth floor. Once there, he daily confronted some unrelenting routine of malaise and malevolence set amid some faceless grid of pre-fabricated offices and welded cubicles. A construction and demeanour so opposed to the stone tradition of

Castilla that Jim would be taken upon to once again immerse his forward thinking into some olive flesh of foreign syntax. Only then could he once again come to terms with the situation in which he found himself, light years away from some time and place the little boy had prepared for him, that which he had foregone so ungratefully. Ending up here at the Madrid branch of Nelson Marketing Inc., specializing in the study of habitual processes – soap powder, appliances, silk stockings– all bound together by some public thirst for consumer rendition. Enterprise sent over from some foreign land, trade indirectly linked to that of the Nether Land though routinely examined through one's own finer scope and appreciated for what it was. Acceptable so long as it were not to upset some finer tilt toward the undisputed maintenance of one's own superior character, superficial nuance designed to profit but never render easily.

His only student would be Dolores. She took great pride in being department chief and, unbeknownst as to whether one had anything to do with the other, she never let Jim in too quickly. There were usually a number of items to be addressed before class could begin, and which would be fine with Jim since he was paid strictly by the hour. Waiting outside her office door was nevertheless instructive. Puzzled glances and non-considered, idle office space whom no-one might ever think too much of having to be wary of. He would often lose himself momentarily in some eighth-floor essence, looking down against some full-length window pane, play-like structures on a busy street dedicated to some most rapid transport within these circulatory confines. These were the daily attempts at transcontinental competition moving swiftly north and then back down again. Pale imitation as far as Jim was concerned, reflections of another place trying to apologise for some inescapable thrust into modernity. Awe-inspiring monuments towering out over Rector Street and Wall, showering their worthy inhabitants with some timeless reward cried out for one's just recognition. All the while calming some smoking ruins whose sometime pitying reminder of meaningless squander, nonetheless testament to the noblest ongoing endeavour, choked us to thoughts and tears harking back to that of the hungry masses entering a harbour full of light and sound adamantly. Al-Andalus as civilization committed once and always to some reasoned consideration of life and love for all who would care to have it, and staring in consternation at some carnage brought about in its name, destructors of some tarnished vision and dubious character probably revelling through the holy place onto which Jim would be staring down at that very moment.. Perfectly peaked arches and gently swaying rhythms, kneeling modestly toward Mecca, naked humility converted into blasphemy by those naysayers who would use the corporate misdeed not as signpost, but as some means for bludgeoning the innocent. Jim had probably seen that structure dozens of times, but only in seeing it from above could he appreciate the vivid contrast it forged against some jet black asphalt, and marking off neatly from its surroundings. The irony of its being next to the city morgue was inescapable as far as Jim could see, tyranny of the old wallowing in some splendid homogeneity while writing off all that refused to conform. Some store-front gateway of Moslem engender lining the walkways of Bushwick Avenue had always belied an easy, if not sometimes turbulent, reside. Welcome your tired masses and poor in spirit while with the steeple and the bell calling out to anyone wishing to carve out some place of their own, advancing to beyond the meeting point from which Jim had been unable to proceed.

He would then turn in frustration to observe the consumer study group within which he found himself. This particular enterprise had been in Madrid for just nine years and had already risen to large market dimension, picking apart the whys and wherefores, habits and peculiarities of some consumer class. Endless pages of thought-engaging questionnaires were churned out day in and day out from within this very

room. Researching everything from where a particular item had been purchased, why it had been so, how it had been so and inquiringly of whether such action might be repeated. Results were tabulated to the minutest nuance. Reeling off and grinding out a lathe of hurling figures which could only make the average citizen cower in unblended insignificance. Jim would on occasion overhear some casual remark, as if having been foretold by his lift to the eighth floor. In this way, he would be able to appreciate the more sordid details of his most worrisome student's outward regard. Considered a veritable bitch by her entire staff, Dolores would often keep notes on each and every one of them tucked neatly inside her *bustier*. It was the only place she was sure no-one would ever find them – not that it would necessarily concern her if anyone had – and thereby be able to well-document some smallest detail when one came up for corporate review. This they all resented and more. At Christmas time, for example, the company directors would give her department some special bonus if they had performed well during the year. It was intended to be distributed squarely and promptly at the beginning of the month. Dolores would always wait until someone either very brave or very cash-poor might decide to claim their rightful reward. In that way, she could always get away with passing on just a bit less than what had originally been intended, and with not even some slightest furtive glance from them who obviously had nothing to lose from such bland assertion, but so much otherwise from being too inquisitive. Being too discreet was never one of Dolores's vices and she would use the extra guarded cash, though not directly toward her personal benefit, to organize small dinner parties – *un petit dîner* as she liked to call them – for her most lucrative clients. *¿Voudriez-vous une autre truffe?* She could often be heard showing off her command of other idioms in and around the office and neither was this a source of kinship among her staff. Most of them actually handled themselves much better than she in this regard – which is hardly a compliment under broad review – but had to usually settle for group classes and often third-rate at that. Sanchez herself had been known to attend more than one of her midnight soirées, and Dolores quickly became one of Sanchez's prized patrons. Jim's time soon became divided amongst her, some military groups and a couple of classes over at a telephone company switching station in the city centre.

When finally it would be Jim's place to enter her office, he did so always belying some certain reticence, as if never quite sure about which of several demeanours he should expect. After all, with her staff she was quite the supervisor but with clients the sympathetic soul in whom they could most eagerly confide. With Jim, she could be any of these depending on what she required of him on that particular day. He might sometimes be called upon to advise regarding the best turn of phrase within the course of one of her irrefutable international lectures — teacher as advisor inextricably linked in sound formative argument was, if not pleasing to Jim, then tolerable. On other occasions, she would be in need of some surrogate staffer to whom she could bemoan the lack of this or that, and unattendingly to the last detail that she had remanded. At these times, Jim would feel it necessary to gather his most steely armour, fend off the undeservedness with pleasant and patient state, for while Dolores's ranting was certainly unbecoming of his place, he nonetheless needed the hours. And so he would sit calmly. Eyes usually transfixed on one dangling ornament or piece of plated gold sporting tastefully, odd sullen features attemptingly of improvement for the benefit of client and non-client alike. More than a bit overripe in stature, she might gesture toward the large glass panes feeding some corporate abyss high above, and back down slowly onto her lap in heated expectation of what were to follow. Never missing some opportunity to scold, she did so without regard to whom Jim was or where he had come from. Indelible foreigner brought back from where he should have been, already weary

of the scolding he had had to endure for having done so. Just castration, Jim would often reason. Bold and just retort to the notion that he might have been able to reverse some tangential objective of his forefathers. Why should he not have become grinding stone to the likes of Dolores Berzosa?

Still at other times, she would treat him as a trusted and worthy confidant. This and a potentially tender experience reviled Jim the most. For in her heart of hearts she knew how the staff would speak of her, and amid whisperings the same was probably true of her clients and even those whom she had always considered to be her best friends. Jim as consoler and healer, unrequited confessional high above ground floor, some rebuke toward those who might stand and stare at the great black marble structure and question why this particular building and this particular enterprise had one day appeared amidst their own living space. Impingingly on the very neighbourhood ease with which they had always carried on with their lives. And here was Jim, as unlikely testament to it all. Repentant of the sins committed against staff and consumer public alike, violation of private trust preoccupied Jim. And yet there were those who persevered in blaming all those who had had the courage to take up the dare, millions of forward-looking spirits in total ignorance and tacit disapproval of the excesses that would inexorably pass in their name, industrial turning-under of those who were at the foundation of its majesty. But should an entire generation and dozens more to follow be disqualified on the basis of those mistakes made in seeking to reconstruct a life form out of some dark rubble? Consideration of weak result as other than some signpost suggested to Jim an easy link with the destructors. Rector Street and Wall as guardian and enharmonic vision to that which had fallen so near. It certainly did preoccupy Jim just as much as if he had not been supposed to be there *quod docere*. But for better or for worse he was, and it would bring him to bear upon the unseemly task which was his. Dolores had always been motivated as far as the finer points of grammar were concerned. Hashing and rehashing the same regular structures were of little difficulty provided she had some proper guidance. Speaking in the past in such a way as to avoid any reasonable misunderstanding was of the utmost concern, and as it should have been. Past endeavor continuing to present form demanded a more general feel, some present perfect oration seasoned with a bit of qualifier perhaps, but nevertheless perfect in its need for openendedness. And not just in any continuous sense, which would in fact become another matter altogether in Jim's mind. Open unknowingly of when one action occurred or had occurred required some secular vision, one free from the dogmatic view toward time as being absolute and unforgiving. Time and place resolved as in complete suspension of mind and thought, relaxing air of psychic drift relieving all pretension of temporal exactitude. Jim might then pause in consideration of the proper way to correct her, taking fully into account some apparent need for accuracy in citing times and places whose past was clearly identifiable. She rarely doubted his expertise, but even in not doing so belied her own belief that he was doing all this out of sheer necessity and unwanting of any didactic or pedagogic remuneration. Thus, any correction he might venture would be accepted as expounding less on some true meaning regarding any general sense of time, and more on the superficial life requirements which one might possess at any given moment. Or for reasons of unintended confluence of past events which blur along the course of one's lifetime, but then redefine themselves at some particularly lucid moment in depicting the evolution of what we have become.

Dolores would have tired of working the grammar by well before halfway through the class, and Jim was never one to miss a cue. After all, as Sanchez had once professed so self-righteously, administering privately was unlike the protocol to be maintained during a group class. *You mustn't permit them to chew on it for too long! ...*

You'll need to consider using a little psychology. She would always squint just a bit on the last word, enunciating sharply the second syllable which, aside from presenting an occasion for some particularly concussive sound, became the precursor to every subsequent Britishly articulated vocal tone that she might tend to speak. Dolores would always be in outright anticipation of some free form which Jim was about to introduce. Willingly laying her pen on the table meant that she was no longer disposed to gathering any more of Jim's input, anxious to rely instead on her improvisatory skills. Thorough satisfaction with having had arrived past the point of playing nemesis to her entire staff, she would now desire to feel Jim upon her in total confrontation. Preparedly for the most gruelling sparring match, war of words for which Jim had to summon his most professional state of being. He always tried to identify the most pertinent professional topics, which were always preceded by some text recounted verbally and in loud voice. Supermarket shelves were taking up a fair amount of Dolores's time during Jim's stance at the company, and he would often recall her passionate tirades in support of vertical product subjugation, arms and fingers gesticulating wildly while searching for just the right piece of vocabulary to cushion her obvious discontent with some inferior explanation. Jim might then shift mightily in his chair and project that not-so-quite-sure air certain to keep her talking. For her time was his, old world filling the new with tedious justifications of why it had taken so long to take up the chorus, and when finally having done so how it could possibly be of any use now. Computer-driven elegy improved through the illusion that some grander space had become small, useful selections borrowed with all the while ridiculing those who might tear down the pedestal upon which Dolores and the rest were so time-honoredly situated. Modern reach in search of that perfect supermarket setting, packaging impeccably designed for the most effective clash amongst cultures would continually motivate Nelson Marketing, Inc. to enlarge its scope and sample space. And yet, would forcing some such corporate ridden practicality really matter in the long run? Could Dolores and her kind truly find it reasonable that they should be brought into the realm of Rector Street and Wall? For they who power some forward-moving engine know all too well how to distance themselves from its hierarchic tradition. Upheld throughout centuries in reverence of some social deprecation and unequally sharing in its proud harvest.

Dolores might be interrupted by some other urgent matter, now having had gone far too long without the input office thrust which had always seemed to enrich her day. Jim could then rest assuredly upon some little remaining time that they would have left together. If it had been a telephone call, Dolores would tend to shoo Jim away as easily as some swatted insect. If a personal intrusion, on the other hand, he would be shamed into raising his eyes just enough to avoid some seemingly voyeuristic intent. Jim would sheepishly begin to gather his notes and quietly take leave while suggestive of an approving nod toward his somewhat tousled student. How quickly it all dissolves back to the place of its departure! Years would suddenly fill his head with thoughts of living and dying, space and time misused in frantic search for some rightful inheritance. Apparently lost amid some grey carpet leadingly onto a trail toward his next language class, his ears would once again give host to sounds of those calling into an unrequited wind. Jim might experience one last passing essence of softest turn of voice and quickly find himself having descended to street level. The lengthiest and most meticulously spun-out novel ends with nay the quickest turn of a page. There to find himself once more amongst the living spaces of the jaded class, and obliged to look onwards.

Jim's decision to pass through the head office had been prefaced by some uneasy determination to make things right. He had harboured no prior inclination to justify

some recently occurring tendency toward one's sadder misgivings. And so he continued in the assuredness that all of this could one day be risen above. Coming down along some final block length, he fell well within the shadow of some white granite cathedral spire, markingly of the spot at which he had been able to find his way easily toward some pleasanter repose. The head office had been carefully removed from the academy itself, and this proved to be no accident. Its students had generally been supportive of its finer goals, and did not much seem to bother over some occasional inconvenience. Some eager exchange across one's own lap mindingly would provide both with some sense of latent grammatical inexpectation. If not for some oddly pristine dissatisfaction, and might prompt some untimely administration which, insipid though it may have been, riled none-the-less. One transcendent spire peaking aloft and upon some verbal communication gloss would provide for an easier commodity, more telling venue for the misspoken few. Jim entered carefully. The morning porter was in the habit of washing the floors early, before the awakening faithful could realize that there was not a single morsel to be had for breakfast. One moving hurriedly toward the nearest *panadería* was not an uncommon sight in Madrid, and often until well into what could be early afternoon in another place. These were the kindest and most generous at Christmas and such, so that the floors got washed in the best of their regard. This, of course, meant that squatters like Jim and those others in the head office were not to be spared any inconvenience. Why should Jim have needed to tread so delicately, seeking just the right balance between himself and he who others thought he should be, when he too could have easily resorted to earning a wage in some such ordinary fashion? He might still have his chance, and this he considered carefully as he rang the doorbell — *bajo dos*. He had always found it curious that he should have to wait so long for someone to let him in. Might everyone have become too comfortable with their present undertaking to attend to any outside intrusion? Then one would immediately be amazed by some bolder contrast, emptier hallway ambient suddenly turned chaotically and more so as the office door were pulled back.. As if having fallen suddenly into some strangely foreign land, Oz unpreparedly through some hitherto untrumpeted dining room door. Jim was especially unprepared for what he was about to be told.

—Is that you, Jim?

—Yeah. Any word on that meeting down at the union hall?

—It happened.

—What?

—Paco suggested that we were all a bunch of assholes. Should've started turning the screws on those guys back in January.

Jim could suddenly feel the icy deliberation of his ancestors weighing even more heavily upon him. Having not only squandered his birthright, he had also failed to see the wisdom in Stevenson's advice.

—Can anything be done about it now?

—Not much. Five months pay is probably gone for good. But that's not the worst of it.

—Come again?

—Company's closing. They found Gonzalez in bed with the director's wife. Got her to spill the beans about where all that money had disappeared to. They're onto it all, but they'll never get those bastards. Probably in Buenos Aires by now.

It had taken Jim an eternity to find steady work. He had spent years shuffling around the city from one burnt-out class to another. At the academy, he had at least found some place in which to reside, some easy repose for himself and free from trodding the path he now most readily despised.

—Sanchez's got some new military contracts coming up and needs teachers to give the basics. Nothing fancy, just conversation.

—We'll see, said Jim.

Walking back toward Serrano, Jim was able to nearly taste the smoke and petrol that seemed to provide him some bank along which to organize his thoughts. He looked for a bridge over the thick aromatic track that arose, black haze in the closest geographic element, cars and trucks moving toward some soiled destination. Once across, Jim's next mind drifted back to the ordinary job. Knowing that which one has to do unencumberedly. Steadily finding one's way and without tending toward any pretext of having to do more. The child holding on to the hand of his mentor, paternal intuition looking out over a sea of thick black, going forward unafraid. And then his child who would soon have to abandon all rightful formation in material support of his faithful bestowers. Land of plenty and opportunity to take but at the harshest cost. Jim's father was the first to be born in the new land. Many professions would be flouted around him, he unable to benefit from any of them and never imagining the day when he would be measuring up Jim. Schools and universities done over with some slightly dangerous academic overtone, temptation to look back at the darker character and bestow upon it a glimmer of soft approval. Jim quickly learned that earning the seal was not more important than understanding why they had arrived in the first place. Sound formation placing one within reach of some egalitarian ideal first and foremost, a gesture they had cherished if hardly understood. Jim's father had worked for forty years on the piers, loading and unloading, an honoured routine made regal by its having answered faithfully to the call of foreign lands. Distant ports still heralding the need for constant uplift, port of call and stevedore acting as one to push this tired race towards moral completion. How envious Jim had become! Forty steadfast years of rhyme and rigor, seasoned brow made more so by the prevailing breeze cutting through the Battery on its enlightened path toward the Nether Land. Park players passing time, gazing over at the ships trudging forth to the Nether Land historically. From which was built the foundation of this thriving trade, towing and lifting, some job ordinary and vital to who we are and what we will become. But Serrano continued to cut to the root of just what it was Jim had still to do. Like it or not, he could not imagine his father caught up in any such kind of laboral irrelevance. Student squalor reaping the banal reward of sounds and syllables trimmed to the turnings of their own sordid ascendancy barely gratified.

Churches robbed of even the most necessary accoutrements, saddened by the path onto which its followers had been diverted. And one might see a steeple rising above some traffic jam in Red Hook and wonder if it might in fact be one and the same. But no. Jim could not fool himself any longer, for the *entorno* of his father's was not his. This saddened him dearly. Visions of his father sitting in cool respite amongst the vines of some well-deserved jubilation, cigar brandished evening flashed into his sensibility with every doorway he passed. Thinking and dreaming back beneath some ripened wine fruit. High haze skyline beach smilingly over some girdered expanse stretching back and over toward Jim's daily nurture. Wondering what must have become of some unorthodox tendency. Years omitted had served no true purpose, and paternal unknowing would become his own least painful endure, some none-too-mutual feeling which derided and tormented Jim. Some well-groomed kaleidoscope sounding out a whirling vision in his head. Church. Steeple. Church. Reality still slipping back into some whitewashed concrete magnificence wall, throne of angels and landscape resolvingly gave in to one finer relaxing moment. Late day, freshly-turned garden render intoxicated with its youthful play watering down upon some generational photograph. Three across, and then some wry smile eeking its way out from his father's face, sincere and robust with all the spark which Jim had only been able to dream of. Would he someday be able to reclaim such humble frame? Or had heartache become too cast for the ever-burgeoning sense of remorse into which he mired? Neighbours darting out seemed threatening to Jim, his executioners carrying out this worn and disappointed paternal sentence. Military contracts, he thought. Jim recalled the last time he had done military work. It was poorer pay than most but still there was a bit of satisfaction in being somewhat useful in the grander scale of things. Jim would arrive to the barracks everyday at exactly 4:15. Any earlier would have meant having to park in the visitor's lot beyond the sub-official's working quarters. This proved to be unpleasant as it was usually knee deep in mud from the water which continually ran down from some broken sewer pipe draining off from the latrines. The smell was overwhelming and, besides, Jim could never walk the five minutes back to his classroom without running into that insatiable staff sergeant who never tired of demonstrating his verbal prowess. When upon the various officers' beginning to abandon their posts for some evening free from the usual military rigour, Jim could unobtrusively set himself into their places. By the time anyone could realize his impertinence, class was out and he was gone— inextricably committed to the next day's lesson.

Jim ended up in the breakfast place after all. Not wishing to have to confront any of those English boys, he slipped unnoticed into one of the side booths. The usual ambient thick with obnoxious intent made him feel even queasier than usual. Swirling toasted sensations mixed with the uncertainty that had again befallen him, Jim managed to spy a moment when any of the three tending bar could prepare him a *café solo*. He had never ceased to be amazed at the fluidity with which some endless number of single servings could pop themselves onto the time-worn altar each day. Rejuvenating constantly among delusional cries of wait for this or that. Jim recalled how his father's father had matinally set down the single serving – one, two or more. No doubt then from sheer habit spawned by a lifetime of wanton self-examination, all the while with waiting for this or that chance to make pristine sense of it all, never sure of its global outcome, confidently suggesting that it was as it had to be and why it must continue. Jim struggled to remember that many years earlier, with his hand joined to that of his paternal mentor, entering into a bay fraught with real or dubious notions of guarded success, he had looked back at the dark character, but then in repugnance quickly turned back again. Looking eagerly toward the next morning's ritual of distant but certain

plenitude. This Jim considered as he suddenly saw fit to pity those engaging in delusional thought on that particular morning, for here there was nowhere to go. Even distant success would seem to be impossible, so long as he continued getting about with the English boys. Stevenson had warned Jim of the superfluosity of their intent. After all, none of them ever had precedents who had crossed over. And why should they? Pompous yearnings and subservient to some blackened class of corporate irregularity. Jim gazed long into the coffee sitting in front of him. If he decided to return to doing military work, he would again be obliged to put up with the rantings of Sanchez. Jim had always guessed that pinning down all those lieutenant colonels might have meant providing favors to them and their subordinates. Sanchez herself was known to have had more than one illicit tryst which, although repugnant to the rest, undoubtedly impressed those who saw great merit in the acquisition of new prospects. But Jim saw no reason to concern himself with the inner dealings of her obviously thriving enterprise, and began to warm to the thought that it just might be the only way to go, at least for now. Some coffee cup dwindling slowly down to whitened alabaster would inevitably ring in the hour of language study. Post-*comida* even in military circles demanded some frame of mind and spirit clear and for the ready, free from the hungering moments of late morning.

Once Jim's car was in place, he would arrive to his classroom at just around 4:20. The room always reeked of lately spent chalk dust and, as it mixed with some well-directed rays of a late afternoon sun, it cast an air at once suffocating and melancholic over the hard wooden floor. Well-aligned table tops mapped out several oases of temporary scholarship, and Jim would always wait patiently for the last person to file in before beginning. Sitting at his desk pretending to be fussing over something or other would have inevitably relieved him of some pre-class calling on. This he came to rather late, and had previously been made to endure many moments of difficult conversation. One corporal he could recall as being particularly challenging, and with telling joyously of some high Alicante sun, afternoon reminder of the lifelong insignificance to which one might easily succumb. It would continue to bear down on Jim. Recountingly of youthful escapades gone wrong and discovering some military undertaking as Jim listened in feigned contemplation. While all approached the task headlong and with the same dutiful stepping out with which they had been trained, these were indeed more mindful of the pledge. Straining to overcome some sorely inadequate grammatical refrain, the corporal would attempt to lay out the smallest detail for Jim, and having struggled to free herself from the smothering comfort of some well-intentioned womb early on. She would eventually become engaged in some starker logistical analysis, heinous warfare plans far removed from that more commonplace line so dreaded by the rest of her regiment and of this she felt proud. Some certain nuclear or biological delight straining the face of this once completely misspent Spanish girl. That the world might eventually become consumed within some foretold armageddon would never concern her, and nor should it. Laboratory techniques misunderstood might go dancing upon her somewhat more egalitarian vision of military life, and with female arguments drowning out some none-too-pervasive adolescent warmth. Olive drab masking the yearnings sought after within some just recent past would momentarily depress Jim, but then urge him on to some higher working ordeal, and consideringly of this just fortitude which seemed to engage her slightly frame. Past experiences melting into Jim might begin to forge some momentary bond between the two, she continuing to entice some complimentary remark with which to soothe over one's overall desire for tenderest rapport, he more than willing to go along with this wholly unsolicited non-committal exercise of verbal interplay. Jim had been used to starting each class with

some written exercise, and when at times his intrusion upon the corporal could no longer be adequately sustained, he might invite her to begin on that day's assignment and until the rest of the class arrived. His adrenaline would have peaked by then and he was sure that at moments like these he could have charmed even the likes of Sanchez. Jim might take comfort in knowing that his was indeed some civilian prize undertaking. Four or five more years could have easily presented itself if not having been for an oncoming appreciation of a more sombre need for some incessant non-satisfaction. Toward unhappiness would always prevail, and sensing some ever stronger sensation for a reconciliation within these many years to follow could certainly appeal to Jim. As distant banter grew louder, Jim would be obliged to return to his involuntary retreat. The English boys had by now become heavily engaged in some dubious pedagogical exchange and, if it were not for Jim's having had taken some more cynical turn, he might have considered joining in. Jim rather began to feel somewhat consumed by it all. Unseemly conversation at this or any other time of the day, and he would be inclined to have no part of it.

By the time Jim left the breakfast place, it was well into Spanish lunch hour. The sun was quite high now and the air seemed to have warmed without regard for most, cool and comfortable reminders of the hours just past. Heavier-than-usual attire became a midday reality, some exercise for prying into one's own sense of self. Dark glances thrown the way of those whose dress had been adequate to fend off the morning chill were vindictively directed by the more traditional, toward those who dared invest in the practicality of adapting to sudden change. And how odd it seemed to Jim, for nowhere had the dividing line been drawn so markedly than in this city on high plain, atmospheric layers absent and denying all soft transition or disregard for some temperance of climate in which one could always confide. Some South Ferry mid-afternoon mist relaxing one's worn-down resistance with times and distances equally distributed jogged his memory. Tales of sea and salt against some finer notion carried readily across a great bay and in just finished study of one tarnished melody. Counterpoint mixed with historical fare would be intoxicating as it blended on a warm spring day. Studies en route to the place of one's own bosom life and recent remembering of what needed to be on the next day's plate, when once again he would pilgrimage toward the masters sitting in wait atop the bell scholarly cliffs of Amsterdam. It must have been the reason and rationale which held him captive to that teeming harbour throughout all those years, and which were to do so during the remainder of his earthened existence. Just that which they had experienced upon first entering is what truly enticed, tales of sea and salt upon some finer inward search. Some punishing light rang down on Jim as he moved determinedly along, at times mixing sadistically with the sky and the bell throwing off its maddening vibration near and above. Harking to some warmer temperatures, it continued to ignore its beguiled audience arrogantly in its guise as keeper of the faithful. While such a sound would have been well-appreciated on Amsterdam – some Lenox Avenue rendition calling out for some proper guardianship – here it would seem to be in excess. Some hapless relic of another time whose was still and without betterment. Jim thought that if he were indeed serious about the whole affair, today it would have to be. Sanchez's office had been on Fuencarral the first time around, some pleasant enough street full of later-era cathedrals. Jim had barely had his fill of it when he decided to leave upon finding some better laboral situation. *You shall not receive any money for the month!* Sanchez always spoke scoldingly, some perfect complement to her peculiarly castrating appearance. She and the rest certainly had the upper hand in all of this, but a bit of courtesy would have been none-too-overreaching. Since the boom, she had been working out of some larger

office space on Castellana, more upscale setting for the type of high-stakes fare in which she pretended to engage (and making it all the more difficult to perceive them for the bunch of fakers that they were). Sanchez could pull the wool over the eyes of the most seasoned entrepreneur, easily convinced of some necessity for sound and smart language command. Jim might have walked some short distance to the main avenue and then caught a northbound bus. He would have then arrived rather quickly to his destination. And too quickly for any impression that he would have liked to offer, for nor did he wish to present himself as having been burdened by some blatant necessity for returning to Sanchez's employ. Besides, Jim would be playing too fast and loose with some later lunch hour uncertainty, surely to cause him nothing but unending confusion and delay — *sobremesa*. He decided to go on foot. It was a pretty fair distance, but the time would be well spent. Newspaper stands hawking the latest fashion magazines an easy effort, lingerie boutiques calling in those who might have otherwise forgotten how to make the most of their good fortune, plying and peeling away one hope after another in generous demur. Jim continued moving within some well-directed lethargy. Some quicker glance off and to his right would bring about meagerly, some double-digit visual reminder of just how far he had still to walk. Some sun drenched early afternoon respite continued to elude, and it was evident that winter went fast receding, some colder infatuation growing fonder along the rutted *desagues* lining the streets of Madrid. When at last Jim began to arrive, thoughts of endless years spinning out into some blackened abyss again terrified, and he was made to acknowledge the towering insignificance of that which we all strive to confound. Some self-inflicted web of daily misfortune to which we invariably cling so dearly. Gilded imaginings of success spurring on some sporadic bands of envy tauntedly, and notions of seldom gracious acts of prostitution being realized everyday in the welcoming heights high above the grey track of Castellana.

Jim must have sat for another hour or more on some soiled bench opposite the entrance to number 219. Periodically glancing down at his watch only seemed to have produced some inner prolong, tempting pleasantly some notion to doze off within the shadow of some cooler afternoon. Glancing downward and again had only frustrated Jim until realization taking hold, time increasingly remarked and stopped. Time had slowly stopped, and obliged Jim to once again curse his stillborn fortune. Time costingly and at the mercy of some gadgetry purchased offhand. Jim tapped on the watch in hope that something sluggish or misplaced might be revived, but it was no use. It had indeed stopped. And Jim began to feel the wage of his indecision threatening him once again in some puerile way, headlong fantasy winking back at Jim and retiringly in quiet dissolution. Behind and in front buzzed the constant whoosh of cars and motorbikes oppositely addressed, one urging him forward and the other backward. One up toward some saving station promising speedy westward tilt and out beyond the meeting point, the other down to some blithe continuation of his continental journey. Jim strained to hear the bell tolling out over Plaza de Castilla, shades along some grey track transforming each vibration into a death knell, kaleidoscopic images challenging his deepening gaze into the lobby of number 219. One, two, three and more it sounded until Jim was confident that he had indeed waited for some proper time. He would be able to leave it off at a jeweller's on his way back, served politely and proper *en el acto* until feeling sure that some recognition of time had indeed been restored. Jim felt the push of circumstance acting in disrespect to all that used to be his, urging him on to some mindless sequence with noise and youth distracting. Those of a distant motivation which used to be his, denying him any looking back and mockingly of some more pressing task. Castellana seemed to be full of these as he at last charted a course through

the fast track, two lanes but then not and in clear defiance of some inner highway piercing the heart of his daily confine. Cars and utility vehicles piled randomly in some horizontal relief congestingly, then not knowing which path to take confused Jim. Number 219. But why the porter disappeared smartly, only to appear again, he couldn't possibly comprehend. Dampened asphalt giving way to puddles of lately fallen rain water challenged as he gazed downwards, and then the utility vehicle protrudingly well beyond forced Jim to return momentarily. Puddles of lately fallen water framing some tire stained with mud and excrement from one late-hour advance. Warm voices again softly distracted Jim, gently gliding over some spent existence whose only recuperation lay in this hapless course towards number 219 and with the porter and the bell. Why might it be sounding again? Warmer voices still and the bell masked the porter and Jim became newly confused. Parallel motion getting him nowhere, displaced at number 217 he sighed and felt further from his destination. He considered what might have become of the little boy and paternal mentor should their own destination had not been so desired. Would they have been left to rot as Jim had? Would they have not looked up at the structure with its sacred objective but arguably sacred foundation casting out from a crippled faith, far past the meeting point and rendered themselves in disgust? Self-flagellation and warm voice became smaller and smaller, disappearingly into the moistened loins of asphalt and laughing up at Jim with every step. The morning porter had always had some added responsibility of caring for the greater abundance— *dobla fila* – space full with vehicles of varying means. Catching Jim's eye suddenly and giving new wind to one's endeavour, angry incarceration now becoming past consoled momentarily. Why should he have had to be the one, after all? Seeds of return in heinous rebuke of his forefathers again confused and sent Jim into one more momentary haze of warmest voice and softly calling subconscious. He would never know for sure. Fair yellow mane offering on either side and still warmer voices passing on the sidewalks along the grey track of Castellana comforted Jim. When all was said and done, these would be the only reminiscences which would matter. Some slight smile mischievously disappeared from his face as he unexpectedly crossed paths with the porter, whose angular deviation seemed oddly upsetting to Jim, but convincingly of its correctness and immediately assuming it confidingly. The porter carrying himself quickly and with dignity inspired Jim to complete his ill-begotten course, resisting any further temptation of giving in to some further idle ideas of delay. Softest delay turning into determination had been Jim's rule, then back again until all those things that Jim had ever wanted or cared about looked small and inconsequential. Becoming tides of quiet languor, hardened malaise or gentle tepid pools of passage looking neither forward nor backward. As if finding himself – alone – on some soiled red carpet directed inward, standing high off the humid pavement. Some island of personal initiative at once empty and humiliating. Glass doors reflecting noise and image off the grey track of Castellana hustled Jim uninspiredly toward some unlikely return. He was, after all, inside the lobby.

A sudden dimness panicked as he stared blankly at the *portería*. Vacant mailboxes dared him to imagine the lives of those they represented in mild repose, or in wait of some slightest most singular remark encouragingly from some distant beyond. Jim's wait had been eternal, but nothing had fulfilled the promise of bringing him back full circle to that place of his endowment, flutes and rapturous voice all having had permanently escaped Jim on that faraway afternoon. Scent of freshly cut grass had ascended sweetly over some unlikely oasis presenting itself pleasantly. Needle faltering harmlessly over some vinyl singing out a magic vibration of sound, mysteriously moving through some stainless piece of servitude toward some amplitude upon which

he could rest his spirit. Which still on the rise, as must have been that of the child and his father as they began to closely perceive what would all appear in front of them, newly and inviting. Devoid of some darkly patronizing tone of those who were enviously left behind, one-dimensional melodrama being played out pathetically at every turn by the self-congratulatory director. Waning moments quickly becoming prelude to some fugue of voice and activity which were to dominate their waking hours during the remainder of their time together and beyond. Jim had indeed often recalled staring at the clock and wondering if he might ever have the opportunity of visiting the old country, home to those of whom Jim would sit and ponder habitually and as regular regime. The *maestros* and time itself would surely have been kind to him then, moments of introduction and tardy recapitulation in support of some larger *gestalt*, some lifetime of expectant successes lightly incrementing themselves and providing a joyous relief to the deafening brass that sounded downwards. But he also knew that finding the proper course would not be easy, and he sensed inclusively that the reins of practicality might one day force his hand in much the same manner as it had that of his forbearers. For in that sweet and beautiful oasis restingly on the mighty plains of ash and soot, hovering regally upon the shoulders of Amsterdam, Jim became one with the scholarship and insight which would find in themselves some means for overcoming all except the earthly squalor, petty bargaining of director and public alike, seemingly to dominate ever more so his present and just present continental undertaking. The porter's sudden bark, crisp and sharp startled Jim from his fleeting stupor. He could now feel that the palms of his hands had moistened considerably.

—¿*Qué quería usted?* inquired the porter.

—I'd like to visit the language consulting. *Me gustaría subir al centro de idiomas.*

Jim had never learned to speak the language very well, though well enough for some occasional purpose. Buying at the fruit stand required no extraordinary effort and he seldom had much difficulty, except for the childish grins his obviously foreign accent might draw. *Extranjero*. Jim would then try to imagine how his ancestors had dealt with a non-native manner, calm and unnerving but leaving in its wake some unexplainable feeling of sunken ambition. Depressingly over a period of time just long enough to give the immediate impression of being permanent but then not.

—¿*Le espera la señora?* asked the porter.

—She's expecting me ... yes. *Me espera a las cinco.*

Jim guessed that he could never fully understand the porter's role, that stately yet none-too-deliberate undertaking enjoyed but so often taken for granted. Rarely had anyone ever bothered to inquire as to Jim's goings about and never had they apparently thought to check up on what Jim had momentarily struggled to concoct. He had not bothered to call ahead, fearing that Sanchez would attempt to use the telephone in a particularly searing manner. Some deliberate attempt to shame Jim into sudden self-awareness, lack of total control understood might have served to convince him to trust Sanchez as his last living hope. Strings of dependency annoyingly pinching his forward

conception until finally crying out in welcome surrender. Jim could not let such a thing happen. He would show up at her doorstep in much the same way as he had the first time. Besides, he had always held out some hope that any slightest perturbation could upset at any given instant, promisingly of some newest professional turn. As he edged closer to the lift, dimness persisted with dark grey shades in broad relief. Showing him the way until some tiny fluorescence teasingly reminded him of the many prior occasions on which he had been subjected to such, silhouetted challenge to enter or be left behind. Heavily sprung metal doors shutting from within engulfed Jim in a world at once upwards and unmoving, harking back to his first job on 14th St. Teaching off-site and in full confrontation with those holding special needs, Jim would often wonder as to some proper path for leading onto one's own intellectual life salvation. He had been given the opportunity of assisting generously within the social welfare. He had been responsible for those of a lesser intellectual fortune, and at his own tender age. Most of the others on the work floor would be going about their business under some watchful eye – chairs and tables in some time period upholstery overlay – as Jim engaged in his own rudimentary somersault nearby. Over and again would only frustrate his still frail teaching capabilities, though giving forth affectionately, and within some unrequited sense of genuine concern. Riding the freight elevator on its slow ascent to the second floor would have shocked Jim into some maternal classroom feeling. Freshly refined sawdust strewn over some freight elevator floor would continue its finite discourse onto the workspace – drills, electric saws – prelude to Jim's final plaster board resting place. Jim might begin with some easy maths, or perhaps a brief word problem in succession of some earlier word play. For concrete learning would necessarily be the rule of the day, concrete learning stages peeling away Jim's already exhausted resources. Hardly anyone would finish the exercises he had laid out. Still, he would find it oddly appropriate that they should at all look forward to his daily lessons. None would ever successfully complete the official course of study, and this Jim knew to be true despite some self-deceiving youth misinterpretation. Instead preferring to perpetually remain on the work floor, beneficiaries of some closed space protectorate eternal, and lendingly of some easier meaning to their stunted lives. Reminiscing fancy brought him to an ever more occurring realization that this was to be his most cherished. Attempting to draw some parallel between those earning years and that in which he presently found himself would offer little consolation. Nor did he attempt to do it often, for fear of cornering oneself within some all too well-known predicament from which he could hardly break free. He often wondered what might have become of the slender Jamaican girl with a smile of gold. Beats droppingly off a Brooklyn pavement would be her not wholly unwelcome life legacy, hip-hop movement dying away and out through the upper reaches of some hardened village. Delancey Street sound dripping beats and playing loud, and louder still while making it harder to find that ear-torn place. They had looked for and found a place for Jim then. Here, alas, his backward journey had never been able to afford the same, and in this regard he was no less fortunate than the rest. Slow motion, vertical illusion entertainedly but for some briefest interlude. Still, it struck Jim odd that no one should be getting on at any of the intervening floors at this time of the afternoon. On the other hand, for what reason might anyone have wished to do business within their own sphere, and at such an early hour? Stepping out of the lift on the tenth floor at last gave Jim some wry satisfaction and for no apparent reason. Facing a large plate glass, he could appreciate the vast visual feast which presented itself, telling of the presumption and self-grandeur to which Sanchez had always pretended. Antennas jutting out against some quickly moving sky, colours flashing reminded Jim of his predicament. Signals reaching out to some distant despair while the earth spins its

completely regular course of inanimate decision beseeches us all to some higher thinking. Impossible problems resolvingly here but perhaps not in another tempts to leave quickly and unobtrusively. Secret images harbouring could have lasted Jim a lifetime but for the ill-timed intrusion of things over which he could summon no control. Details and information in an instant transcurring through some low-frequency haze of camouflaged noise and evil intent, made good by the knowing of some deeper structure. Placing his finger over the doorbell of Beta Language Consultants S.G., he felt more and more confident that this should have been its just response, and in doing so rested a bit more happily than when he had come in. Some faded plastic pressure bored Jim and he went on with his gaze. Again in repose, he continued looking out at the sky and sensed a bit of rain. The blue from another place encroachingly set his mind on the unlikely coexistence he had once imagined for himself, planned and framed between those worlds which he would attempt to reconcile. Briskly moving sky easterly and out from that against which every bone in his body shattered in remembrance or sweet embrace. Jim suddenly found himself confronted by a young woman in her late twenties, pretty enough and with some tightly cropped short length of hair. She could have been any of those below, fashion-news devotees made up with the newest line of facial crème. Carrying herself well enough and with some decidedly intimate presence , some scented provocation sensuously put and no doubt desired by many.

—*Buenas tardes*, she said.

—*Buenas tardes*. Would it be possible to speak with the director?

He often enjoyed a puzzled look, surrenderingly and upon being led on in some teasing way. As if receiving at a language school should necessarily presume some more-than-slight command of the idiom.

—Is she expecting you?

She impressed Jim as having a particularly kind accent and wondered if Sanchez had not again been recruiting abroad through one of those illicitly-run agencies. Rumours would continue to abound regarding other endeavours with which she was purported to have some less-than-noble business relationship.

—Actually, she isn't. I used to teach here and have just found myself needing some classes. I didn't think she would mind a visit.

—What was your name, then? she asked.

—Jim...Jim Cantrell.

His explanation had not seemed to bother or predispose her in one way or another. His meandering insignificance might have offered her some jealous reprisal for losses past. Undeservedly so and long gone, but enduring beneath the cold of some heightened sense of ageing insecurity. She seated him in one of those generic pieces of furniture usually found and telling of some less high-minded aesthetic. Cold metal and connected to thoughts sprung from well-emptied pools of wait longer transfixed, and more so as the receptionist returned. Then back across the room arrivingly in full

portrait, bathed in late afternoon light downwardly directed. Forty-five degrees against a face of rose-coloured sensation into which one's very own existence seemed to melt. Placing one over the other in uncaring resignation and with tints and shades of varying beige upon each gentle gesture. Jim shifted slightly to one side in order to better appreciate a bleached relief, heartened and then back to a time of lying in some early evening light eagerly but then disappearing. Days on end of tired frustration, unable to conquer some paler complexion, some sound mockingly at his own doorstep and coarse reminder of all the ungiven psychology, misbegotten ideas which had evidently been denied him. Swimming lengths through fluid resistance, holding back in decidedly forward direction toward some purest reward. Some swiftest ruffle momentarily enticed him into forgetting why it was that he had arrived, fragrant mistrust of some softer inclination enhanced into this pristine canvass which he continued to endure. Muse of fine black and still finer along some silkened figure, reminiscently of many and casting into insignificance all that Jim was unwillingly bent on achieving. Some inexorable escape into one's own existential womb looking outwards, through some fragrant rose petal feature and daringly of some more determined insinuation. Some silk-screen image in transparent relief unrequitingly beautiful.

—Miss Sanchez is on the telephone, she said.

—Oh, I'm in no hurry.

She spoke as if not having been able to recall whether Jim had been informed as to the conditions of his brief wait. Neither could he, and this only reinforced in his mind some unintended miscalculation in the manner with which *he* had been silently attending to *her*. It was to be all too brief, however, as Sanchez at once appeared.

—Hello, Jim. How' ve you been?

He became confused by the spontaneity with which it had occurred, presenting itself in some almost vulgar way and relative to all that had been taking place.

—Lately, not that well. I don't suppose you've heard about this Opening School mess.

—Oh, sure. It's rather been news. Don't tell me you were amongst the affected ...

— ...didactic personnel. That's right.

The newspapers had always dismissed it in some journalistic way, insultingly and within a jargon telling of some particularly crueller piling on. As for his dealings with Sanchez, he had come to prefer anticipating such remarks rather than suffer them outright. She made some attempt to conceal her gloating and enjoyingly at that. A preliminary picture of Jim against some upscale office space only reinforced the darker character in his mind, with once again calling forth notions of some child moving forth. Some bay of welcome and receipt discouragingly of all such kinds of false bravado. Flashes of bell sounds once again dazed Jim into overcoming and question exactly why

he had agreed to any of this. Half-past-five ringing in some wayward regime high above Plaza de Castilla. Tardy souls barely intoxicated on the food and drink of their harrowing routine and returning necessarily. For Jim could at least rescue some tiniest piece of unsettled satisfaction, knowingly within some doubtless opportunity of not having had to be amongst the regular shift.

—It seems to have been run by the *mafiosos*, said Jim. It started out as a pretty good deal, though – steady pay and decent working conditions.

Sanchez was unfazed.

—Well, that’s what I heard.

She had begun to garner that sense of omniscience for which she was well-known.

— I was told you had some new military contracts and needed teachers, he said.

—Would *you* be interested, Jim?

—Sure, why not.

—Wonderful! Because, you know, I really *am* in a bind. They want me to send someone over tomorrow morning. Could you do that?

—Tomorrow...I suppose so.

—Come into my office and we can discuss the details.

She would continue to surprise with that peculiar habit of turning nouns into verbs willingly, shifting emphasis set awry and without any regard for some better nature left behind. Jim entered her office, if not suspiciously then at least remembering all those previous months in her employ.

—Sit here and I’ll just give you the usual paperwork to be completed for social security and the like. You know, just return them to my receptionist tomorrow or the next day once you’ve filled them in.

Sanchez seemed eager to begin.

—I see you’ve found a new one, said Jim.

—What was that?

—Receptionist.

—Oh, yes. Carolina. She’s not a quick study but very correct in her manner.

— ...and more so, I’d say.

Sanchez was unlikely to have appreciated Jim's last remark, satisfying only to Jim in any case and all too intent upon settling into some overly imposing leather chair.

—Now, there are some things for this assignment that you'll be needing. It would rather require some special materials.

Sanchez truly delighted in her profession. No one had ever doubted her penchant for pedagogic rigour. It was rather some occasional dubious moral fibre which offended even the most steadfast acquaintance.

—I heard it was just conversation, said Jim.

Language teachers in Madrid would be quite varied and with differing ideas as to how to get on with it. A great many knew absolutely nothing about language teaching. Indeed, many had never come into contact with any student, whether idiom-related or not. These were usually the younger set, cool tourist attraction peddling off of one's natural abilities. Hours at any price might suffice for the weak stomached, all-night drinking parties at some bar in the city center. Then up at nine for some first class with one of the locals, calling on one finer news dedication for some easier pulling over. Some *rain on the plain* exempted squarely, some fixed-price formulations extracted wantonly from the coffers of some such second-rate enterprise. Although this might not have necessarily been the case with more serious-minded academies, these were few and far between. Conversation was, therefore, the call of the day. Finding a feather in the lot might send one off to the whiteboard, inventing of some sterner notion and seeking out one diviner explanation as if from another time or space. Trying to recall those lesser regarded lessons from one's youth and upon some *ad lib* delivered timidly. Wayward resolve being called back to one's own panic stricken sensibility and wondering, until some softest configuration might distract from the principal drill so callingly. Some gentle breeze visionary pressing upon one's own delicately chosen object. A kind word, or perhaps some tender implore teasingly within the confines of this once fruitful exercise. Some coming under and imaginably of one's early morning resuscitation might lead one to covet the very half to whom she had given herself over in proper abandon. It would not be difficult to imagine the receptionist in such terms, slowly generated rhythmic routines duly appreciated might result in some longer relationship overly perceived.

—Conversation, yes, but also a working knowledge of some basic concepts vital for a correct functioning in what they are called upon to achieve in their mission. You can see that, can't you Jim?

She spoke scoldingly and offering little patience for Jim's seeming impertinence. A long silence ensued as she fumbled through some pile of folders and manuals atop her desk.

—I can't imagine where they could be. They were sent over yesterday. By courier, you know.

—Uh-huh.

—Let's just go over and have a look in the shelves. It won't take a minute.

Sanchez rose and disappeared behind a wall of books and folios. Tattered and yellow offering out over some square meter space, stepping around and back again gave Jim the impression that she really had never had any special materials at all. But seemingly in order to better justify his accepting the classes, he the lone responsible facilitator and making amends for the way in which she had treated him. Of course, she had not offered to pay him what was still owed from upon his last departure, and nor did he ever expect that she would. But her being in somewhat of a difficulty – *I really am in a bind* – would usually have her going off into some time consuming search of special materials. And so she once again disappeared, not giving mind to the extra plate well-exhibited as she bent down and over for yet another go of it. *It would rather require some special materials*. Jim started feeling strangely relaxed by it all. Crossing one leg over the other in gentle recline he glanced uncaringly at the ceiling. He dabbled in some delicate play of tic-tac-toe, and then again upon some slighter imperfection. Month-old stains daring some quick dart from his playful eye, stretchingly and affording him a much needed win within which he could temporarily thrive. At once he again caught sight of the receptionist, and gracefully in study of the documents over which she had been given charge. *She is not a quick study!* Her profile seemed to cry out for some just conclusion to whatever it was that Jim was doing there. Sleek and daring of anyone whom she might have occasion to greet. Nightly routine of regular time and place amongst friends in search of some slightly tainted appetite. *Otro cubata, por favor*. Festively and in full pleasure until having to enter at half-past-eight each morning, passing the porter in cheery ascent and expectant of even the smallest demand which Sanchez would quickly lay before her. Not a quick study, perhaps, but Jim had rarely seen one glide so sweetly over stage work floor unpretendingly of even the slightest show of malcontent readily directed towards her. Requiring employ from head to toe, much like Jim himself. Lack of anxious enthusiasm about anything that might ease some constant gnawing discomfort within her, and for which she obviously had little need.

—Here they are, said Sanchez, as well as some other things which just might supplement wonderfully!

Having again been made to come to, Jim leaned forward onto the desk in front of him. Sanchez made her way around and back to the other side. Then raising his forehead, eyes widened in false anticipation brought Jim back into some proper consultation and trying to put it all into some clearer light.

—Here we've got some tests of level which you should consider using. Some have been studying and speaking for quite a while. They've attained pretty good levels and can speak fluently and appropriately in their chosen turns of phrase.

—Okay.

—We'll nevertheless need to stratify them a bit, as I've been made to understand that those capable would be sent off quite soon to stations abroad, while the others could be made to languish on a bit longer.

Jim was not quite sure what she meant by the last remark.

—What's more, I should tell you that the tests of level do *not* necessarily reflect their speaking abilities. No, they're rather unreliable in that respect. Any tendency toward proper use of syntax, or no, becomes clear certifiably upon consideration of some slightly skewed scale of performance, but that is all. You do realize, Jim, that we here at Beta Consultants have always strived first and foremost to satisfy our clients' most urgent needs. And in this regard, we are prepared to forgo the usual rigor-more-all for some sounder reflection of their capabilities. The validity of such tests is questionable at best, and we certainly do not seek to become heavy types – *pesados* as we say here in Spain – and therefore quite logical in questioning the integrity of such routine formalities.

—Why do we bother at all giving these level tests? asked Jim.

—Oh, come on ...for the higher-ups! We can't be seen as being too lax in our regular regime. These are military people, after all. You've got to play the game!

Sanchez had always been somewhat of an enigma. Scholarship achieved would present itself in some superficial way, walls covered with certificates and diplomas at first impressingly but then in disrespect of one's better judgement. Shaking hands with the president of the Texas Association for the Betterment of Small Business International Alliance, she would present some stark cynicism against the discourse wall, smilingly and in fullest awareness of one well-thought-out scheme. She might have taken the microphone, cheaper acoustics fed back through some regular course of turkey dinner and bland conversation, put together for the benefit of some long buried social ideal whose time would never come. Then sitting at the presenter's table in anxious thought returningly to some motherland plain. Her tiniest seed of civilization moved onwards and attemptingly to plant and sow amidst some brush cover of ancient principle, doomingly to wither away in prompt overwhelm. And yet, at times Jim could sense some faintest glimmer of generosity toward her subject matter. Genuine joy in opening up to the latent formation to which she had been called. Licensing sincere in English philology working forthright. Alas, Sanchez had become a caricature of all she had ever intended to be. Drawing into her every wayward soul, seeking some bit of easy gain pretendingly of sound service and intention. Proud of having helped to bridge the gap across to the Texas Association but never thinkingly of some higher contradiction. Years and generations ago attemptingly in search of some escape from the darker character. Just as free as if flying in direct wing from atop that steeple overlooking solemn square, bell calling as if from high above the plaza, ringing down remorse and pity upon those whom his forefathers had once renounced. Remarking staidly with nothing but kind words and good intentions. Church...Steeple...Sky... High above, some sacristan calling to an aging flock, aging formation within which knowledge becomes but some cruel device to be taken advantage of, and for nothing except pure

personal reward, ego-satisfaction drawn upon by some still lingering doubt and insecurity. Secular misplay given reverberated by the wrongdoers on both continents, but held sacred only on one. And for what other reason could it be if not for some time honored regard of caste, real or virtual but vile nonetheless. This Jim could never live down if it were he in her place.

—The tests of level once completed would have you presenting them with some detailed description of the course...

—Just one more thing, he interrupted.

—Of course.

—I really thought that this was to be a more loosely put together project. Some grammar, but more directed toward a conversational feel and not so...

— ...structured? Yes, but we must not sacrifice rigor for convenience. Can't you see that, Jim?

It cost Jim to speak in such a didactic jargon. After all, he had spent the better part of his youth in direct opposition to such vulgarity, earthly drawl and with whiling of time on end in listen to the finest voices. Desiringly and in ache of some artful imitation, indirect but sincere facsimile pored over. He had come to all of this rather late. The actual teaching had been taken up as more or less a last resort, arts and sciences remindingly of some further need to transcribe and beyond. Younger generational responsibility would always be paramount, albeit cherished by so few. Gazing back at some diminishing set of contours, one's Amsterdam retreat could never forgive us all. Uneven distribution and readying the battlefield would all fall upon Jim and those who shared in his academic misfortune. Notes torn away in harrowed frustration would be his all-too-burdensome life legacy, and with the purest of souls all the while wishing him on to something better. The teaching of language had eluded him altogether, and in this respect he too found himself mired within some incidental excursion for which he had always chided those he had commonly referred to as the travelling teachers. Some finer formation was always to be appreciated, although Sanchez and her kind would forever be satisfied with whatever happened to stumble their way.

—You've got a course syllabus, then? asked Jim.

—Yes, I have. I developed it myself – in conjunction with Beta Consultants, that is.

She never missed an opportunity to cover her tracks just in case things got out of hand. Feeling confidently in his mind, she produced some not-too-brief manual, well-bound inexpensively and placed it squarely in front of Jim.

—That looks like the one I used for the intermediate group at the barracks.

—It is basically, but with some very important additions tailored to their specific lines of duty. You'll notice, for example, that third conditional

structures have been especially sought upon in this version. As has deductive language, past and present, so important for the rather sort of secretive communication with which they'll be called upon to deal.

Jim hardly heard the last bit, as it had so often been his habit to block out reflexively most of what Sanchez had been saying. In that way, she could always be newly approached and in some fresher manner, some hope of more palatable conversation to follow.

—Say that again, Jim?

But Jim was not aware that he had said anything at all. Only in recalling some faint bucal sensation in his lower jaw gave him the impression that something Sanchez had said must have been quite calling to his attention. Not feeling sure of exactly what it was, he apologized and invited her to continue.

—Oh, no. That's all I have to say about the manual, she said. You can keep this copy for yourself.

He slipped both the bound pages and test of level into his bag.

—How will you be arriving there, Jim?

—Depends on where it is.

—Haven't I told you? Quite the out-of-the-way location, I'm afraid.

—Is there a bus line?

—Yes, but it's not very regular. Not much cause to head up that way, I guess.

—Is it the barracks up at *Tres Cantos*?

Sanchez shook her head in quick, deliberate fashion.

—Let's just say it's a headquarters, Jim, and leave it at that.

Not having had asked about the location before accepting the post only reiterated Jim's lifelong lack of foresight. Sanchez seemed to have always delighted in sending teachers off to the furthest reaches of the city. Some far-off redistricting and always hopefully of one kind soul to eventually show the way, only to be newly disappointed upon some gut feeling of aimlessness, anonymity and regret returning. He would almost come to question the very steps which had placed him in his present dilemma.

—Would you like a bus schedule, Jim?

—No thanks. I'll probably drive. Is there a gas stipend?

—Beta Consultants will reimburse you for half of your petrol receipts. That's

the best we can do, I'm afraid.

—Has the wage gone up, at all?

—Since you last taught for us, it's been raised 100 pesetas an hour.

That was over two years ago, thought Jim. An hour echoed and inside Jim's head over and over he could hear it taunting him and echoing even further into some time passage and crying out within a bell rush of vibration. Hours and days, days and months to years arching out some longer and longer pantomime of tired assaults, spaces of hours and days being spent in lonesome concert with one's own lifeline, some screenplay founded upon moments turned to hours and then hours more. Jim began to feel an odd dizziness coming over. How often he had experienced just that! At times overwhelming, while at others simply some mild inconvenience begging for recognition and reeling off an endless stream of mind numbing information. Feeling grateful for the latter, he insinuated some gracious accept, rose from his chair and extended a hand in gratitude.

—Well, then.

—Here's a map you can use to find your way. The exact address is on back and they'll be expecting you at 8:00.

He politely refused her offer to show him out, thinking that he might steal some last glimpse of the receptionist who, alongside Sanchez, would have been surely to disappoint.

—Oh, and just one more thing, Jim.

—Sure.

—They would rather prefer no conversation at all regarding either present assignments or the installation itself. Could you keep that in mind?

—Of course.

As Jim began crossing over to the door, he quickly realized that the receptionist was no longer to be found. He made no venture as to where she might have gone, but smilingly and with renewed intent he reached for the door. Having now stepped back out into the corridor, the lift seemed to be further away than ever. Some gentle reverie which had accompanied him up to the tenth floor had become moot, and this would always be amongst the most worrisome of results. Time casting about at Jim's expense would continually set him upon thoughts not inconsistent with one's own sacrificial life retreat. Time as nimble warrior unceasingly and until laying down before some foregone sense of light eternal. Moving down and toward some erstwhile new beginning would nevertheless continue pretending to be Jim's sole saving grace, some downstairs light pulling him back out onto the track and better path along which he had come.

-II-

Jim rose early the next day and with an idea that it was to be his well-chosen return. Shaving barely and not bothering to achieve much of anything, he sat down to his usual instant breakfast coffee and tepidly supporting himself on a white formica. Eyes slowly staring through a plate glass and then another out to some darkened forest of dream sleep covering. Mornings had always been the hardest time. Trapped between the sleeping subconscious and unimaginable climb. Hours ahead of going forth slowly in some life-threatening desperation. Some wake-up call come too late for having known better and thinking about all those poor souls vanquished. One by one, they disappeared in startling anguish, pale faces and becoming lost in some moving reverie wrought with uncertain conclusions. Emerging packages of urgency kept unawares and useless except for she who spent her last dying breath distractedly into a sea of white paper fancy. Dreamingly and yearning for all that had gone away in careless disregard. Gentler breeze continuing on toward the Nether Land would lift one, loftingly and in direct rebuke to some backward civilization downturn. Retentive thoughts. Stifled dreams. Dreams and interrupted sleep eternal begging some earlier morning greater casting forth. Restingly and at peace with some higher pursuit, recently inaugurated protectors of this ne'er flourishing race. Insignificance conspired against Jim and he picked up his bag in response. Turning one key over the other, hidden tumblers forging some coldly defined re-examination consecutively took Jim into some faraway time. Easy pursuit into a St. George terminal would continue indefinitely and with all the while dreaming of some earlier morning sense. The general early hour had cloaked him, and would continue to do so throughout his lifetime. Little remaining and yet everything. Seas and algae splashing up upon some metal shore of dreams and hopes germinating out and away from past places. Newer location and in virtual defiance of some strictly defined moral and social order unknowingly descending into what might have become theirs and his own. It was pitch black as Jim walked to his car. The sun would not appear for another hour, and this Jim knew to be true despite some uneasy longing for quick judgement, uneasy feeling for the things and places which never seemed to be rid from his moistened routine. Parched nurturing of dampened psychologies and anxiously to begin the mindless chores so necessary in being able to temporarily soothe over some quickly diminishing earthworn presence. Driving down and then up around toward the north side seemed to cost Jim his life's journey increasingly incensed. Thoughts and more thinking back within some unending revision would cause him to wander along a road so little travelled, and this particular morning would be no exception. Needing to arrive at some given time and place often cost Jim until finally surrendering to some sullen hand helpfully along a gilded way — *hasta la rotunda*. But where would Jim go then? For the circle at which he would arrive speaks softly and too softly to be heard in offering him some surer way forth, more likely tricking and laughing at Jim for the way in which he had set himself up for slaughter. Not knowing that which might be awaiting him at the end of a winding road was precisely what had been enticing since early on. Jim had ventured onto a well-presumed path and right at the traffic circle as he had been told. He nonetheless seemed to be going nowhere. The map Sanchez had given him turned out to be totally useless. Light haze intermittent against some black canvass strained Jim's eyes as he rode past one by

one, each saluting some consecutive drive and hopefully onto some less equivocal proposition. Jim soon reached a dead end. Due to the darkness, he struggled to notice a limestone structure to his right, coming up and terminating at some corner unforeseen geometrically. Lone sentinel amidst the morning dew cautioned Jim to turn away, and this he did with some sharp deviation to the left and up to his briefest search for a place at which he could resume this most recent misadventure. He refrained from some quick glance down at his watch. Habit had long gotten the best of Jim, and he had put it on despite some uneasy awareness, recent recollection and tending toward some inherent contradiction. Still, he was confident that it would have confirmed his having had arrived well ahead of time. Not wishing to enter so early was tantamount, polite refusal of some poorly thought-out life lesson and barely coping at that. Jim took a moment to rest his head back, glancing up and to his left bringing on some sharp beauty sensation. Pinpoint of dazzling ray lighting up the corneal screen of some well-worded poem delightedly in active recline. Venus picture frame of some perfectly developed photograph beaming out and towards one at quick light speed. Some early morning night cover had shed its black all-encompassing upon Jim. How long and far might that beam have been able to transport him? When and where could he have arrived within its protective embrace? It might have delivered him back to the meeting point high above some tired sanctuary. Or foretold of some abandonment reckoning, old for new and wondering aloud in self-righteous regard as to how one could live and endure in such a time-worn state. Where upon some loftier gaze descending, some darkened shadows capped two, then three more passing just under eye-line sight with horses driving on sounds of clip-clop startled Jim. The beauty was unimaginable, some concurrence of every last piece of lost joy ever conceived! Some youthful flower too sublime to endure and wonderingly if there could really be any way back, or onwards forever toward some white-mist pastel color. Valhalla resting peacefully at the end of that beam, yet pretentiously of one's own point and restless nature. Sharply marking out some slow exit of one's own being and reclining forward onto some stifled calling out. This is how it had often occurred to Jim. Emerging from his car in awareness of some silently-not-so air sensation chilled around his ears and forehead, and only to better appreciate some gaining approach of one more patterned night compression, equestrian learning of some finer character. Going it alone downward towards a limestone wall certainly, and gave Jim the impression of one well-guarded presence. Steel and barbed wire playing peacefully off a dark morning sky seemed to encourage some brighter moment, and he could savour the promise of some orange beginning alighting behind the taller structures which clearly defined the central city. Off at a distance and Casa de Campo laying down before some pathetic imitation nevertheless impressed Jim. Some welcoming mid-orange glow, and yet not. Drawing closer along a not-so-steep incline demanded some larger fortitude and wider appreciation across any dead end street. Sanchez had said nothing about horses, and this led Jim to momentarily consider that he, too, had been coaxed onto a different path, wrong for now but then invitingly in the longer sense and perhaps even welcome. Some limestone began to overwhelm as it grew nearer and nearer, and distant planets fading blindingly into this next-day texture thereby assuring Jim that it was to indeed take place. Just as Sanchez had intended. In this place where a life might find easy turn and begin some slow steady crawl back to where it had been entered upon. The heavy metal gate structure which Jim had confronted now seemed to be fully exerting as it again pushed him persuadingly away from some left-turn direction. He instantly situated it well to his back. Knowing the gatekeeper was continuing to observe and resisted the temptation to reverse his gaze, as though Jim had had anything to hide or be wary about. He recalled the plodding

inconvenience that such official formality could bring and was prone to no baited intention or toward any such delay on this particular morning. Where upon having exhausted the left-wall structure, he entered into some open relief and sharply contrasting the impasse from which he had just been discouraged. Some dead-end gate used selectively and would lead Jim to consider that it might have made for one fairly discreet entrance. Several well-dressed gentlemen strode quickly past Jim, and back out toward the side walk from which he had just arrived. Nor was their general demeanour much what Jim might have expected. It only added to his initial impression that this was unlike the last military site at which he had taught. He entered hesitantly.

—Buenos días. Soy un profesor de inglés de Beta Consultants. Me esperan unos alumnos a las ocho.

Jim stammered a bit as he spoke, though for no apparent reason. The foyer had not been particularly threatening, though a bit smaller than expected and gave the impression of being secure and correct in its glass metal décor. It seemed to have been built from some specific design. Some menace unforeseen and close enough to be taken seriously, though under some consideration that something easier might have sufficed. Perhaps he had still not been convinced, failing to thoroughly digest some afforded response of the exterior guard, or maybe in recalling the security camera above with its quiet insistence on some forlorn practicality. Nothing had so far given him any clue as to where he was. In any case, Jim had done the best he could to explain his sudden appearance.

—¿Me dejas tu documento, por favor?

Jim was initially unsure of what he was being asked to do, even though he had been requested to present his identity card just about every day for the past ten years, and at one place or another. Not for any specific language difficulty, but rather some plate-glass turning back sound at its own and forcing Jim to lean his forehead up and against in search of some proper path of communication. Oral exercise as prelude had always been his soundest piece of advice, and here it seemed to take on some even greater urgency, some taxing of one's better ability to put forth clearly and concisely. The officer was now framed and oddly reflected back at Jim as he slipped his card through a narrow slot in the glass. It was inspected more rigorously than usual, and this might have given Jim cause for concern in any other circumstance. But attributing to some more rigidly defined life obligation gave it no further thought. Years of military discipline had obviously taken its toll and Jim would not want to offend the man. Still, it took a rather unexpected turn with Jim's being asked to put off his duly-scheduled first visit.

—Hace el favor de esperar en la sala de atrás. Ya te avisaremos cuando puedas subir.

The desk officer spoke at once authoritatively and with that not-wholly-unfeigned politeness that Jim had had to endure for so many years. He had not realized that there was indeed a waiting room and just off to the right of the principal entrance — *sala de espera*. Waiting, it seemed to Jim, had always here been a well-deserved exercise. With barely so much as a nod to the officer, Jim turned and again measured steps across a black speckled linoleum deliveringly onto some closed-door space. Once

inside, Jim was complacent enough though still a bit disappointed in the delay. Had there been some problem with his identity card? Why had the officer not returned it? And Jim continued to be curious about why not one of the few people he had seen since arriving was in uniform, lacking in some just visual reminder of the mission to which one had been called and declared willingly to accept and achieve. A sound military code demanded it. Yet he sat in the second of three black chairs confidently and with patience, lining perpendicular to the place of entrance and mockingly of some starker windowless ambient. Without anything specific to consider and in light of some pre-being mindset, he reached into his bag and produced the test of level which Sanchez had given him. Neatly laid out and with a distinctly professional appearance, it certainly presented the case for some critical learning reliability. It occurred to Jim that the usual photocopies would have to be arranged for, and when in consideration of some present time equation rendered an impression that he might not be able to get through everything that he had intended to do. Lesson plans pushing back against unforeseen events had never ceased to amaze Jim. His gaze became suddenly fastened onto some singular portrait, at just above eye length and adorningly. Some singular portrait as such was procedural, chief commander in regal attire looking on in paternal oversight. Morale constraint left unretained until one could further their own solely through some more mindful inner sanction. Inner strength opening up and deliveringly onto some shield-ended plate of national will. Some service directed outwardly and toward the betterment of one's own sense of social obligation. The room was surprisingly quiet, and testament to the heavy metal door which insulated it from the foyer. It only reinforced some nagging sense of misbelonging, as some regal authority continued to promulgate its unrelenting stare upon Jim. He wondered if he should set himself a limit, one on which he could rely without seeming to be too overbearing. Happenstance overcoming some tired reality as was his, and that he was there not for any pleasure-seeking nor encouragingly of his own. It was arguably a favour to Sanchez, or so he would have liked to believe. Empty wall-space grey above and more above looking upwards brought Jim back to some adolescent-end trance. Associated with some perpendicular wall-strength white and unknowingly left Jim with little more than some passing notion of dedicated scholarship. Vocation pressed onward through the chimes and efforts of a well-intentioned clergy, secular defeat looking back and out through some sacred stained-glass dome and all knowing of the meeting point to which Jim had arrived and forsaken. It occurred to him that the room was impeccably kept, as was the little else that he had been able to see up to that point. A stark and welcome contrast to the barracks at which he had given classes some years earlier. Green worn-uniform walking and splashing through mudden pools strewn this way and that. Artillery equipment proved to be no match for some weathered resolve turned depressingly in Jim's world, and would often urge him to reconsider his somewhat already torn mission. Why had he agreed to return? A question so engrained in his mind and insatiable in its desire to torment and humiliate Jim. Regular classroom shifts had afforded him some new breadth for too short a time, then vanishing and reminded him once again of the abyss into which he had been hurled. What would Stevenson say if she knew that he had lingered on until the very end, lying prone beggingly in such shameful respite? Hopingly in wait of some remedy properly timed and seasoned.

The door opened suddenly and a tall grey-haired gentleman stepped in. His general appearance struck Jim as implying more years than he might have actually had. Without so much as acknowledging Jim, he sat down in an adjacent seat. The man had looked familiar. Although by now, Jim was wondering if he should temporarily ease his growing suspicion of having been either neglected or forgotten, and since the gentleman

had gotten some equally good look at Jim he saw no reason to insist upon some mutual recognition. Both persisted in a forward directed gaze, eyes shifting neither one way nor the other. Indecision began to get the best of Jim, and this he had endured upon years and years of feeling his way through interminable self-justification and unendingly so. Moving on and then back had always made for some easy excuse if not incalculable wait. The tall gentleman let go with a slight throat sounding inwardly, muffled reverberation sensed politely and reserved. The door to Jim's front left seemed to negate the cold right-angle plane which he had taken for granted, spilling over its maternal yearnings with a call toward Jim's better judgement. He had always felt awkward and uncomfortable in situations like these without really knowing why. Lack of staid planification imposing its unforgiving course and unable to fit into any role situation momentarily called for. Some sudden mind vacuum at once took hold of Jim, and cold empty war maneuvers began to fill his head with historical reference patterns and newspapers decrying of one life turn after another. He might have assumed that there appeared something in the room to set off such an unlikely rumination. The portrait, perhaps, with its incessant challenge to Jim's permeating disregard. Policies designed to ensure some greater sanity played off the military involvement with which he had once again become acquainted. Military whys and wherefores leading some pleasingly everyday existence above a green cut lawn, walking resolute within one's duty-filled obligation but all the while enjoyingly of some finer diversion. Language learning to be sure, but other things as well and always in some even-handed way, never once chastened by some other type of superfluousness. The greater political gestures above would always be a mystery to Jim. Debates told one upon the other and then again within some shameless discourse going on. Jim caught sight of some well-used bulletin board at the far end of the room, diagonally and without any effort toward the tall gentleman seated immediately to his right. Senseless manifestations of one existence or another calling up from beneath some tired population. Jazz music psychologies, writings of some stark totalitarian lifestyle sprung from cold connections edging out between one side and the other. Bust went the stage theatre rendering of some child-spoken dramatic strife! Nonsense syllables strung along in shame and insinuating of some striking casualty among the enlightened few. Waiting and more so until tactical errors confused Jim within this slightly sullen pedagogical world. Jim had never considered himself to be a standard bearer for the profession. Nor would he ever. Some awaiting within uncommon strides, forays into those less probable situations should have provided him some certain cause for continuance. Alas, it had not. And why that should have been he could not say. Unprepared to play the role and unwilling to accept the consequences of giving in to sheer practicality, undeservedly inferior notes were irrevocably doled out and stubbornly held onto until Jim could no longer tolerate some sharp breaking down. He might have considered picking up a newspaper, here laid flat in plenty and beneath some rigid royal portrait. He would soon tire of such ramblings, false antidotes wanting in some information intention. Seeking to confuse and at once entertain accomplished little of either, providingly of some more sinister draft yet to come. Going off and more sounding out about events conspiring worldly out of control, spheres of broken diehard fiddling about with some very nature on which we all depend. Still commentary beholding of some cooler past, lunchtime reading moments dotted with newspaper configurations mixing through some smaller potpourri of jargon confused most, mockingly of some steady carrying forward within one's new world feeling. This blank-wall stare became increasingly difficult and with military colours glaring outward and unwelcomingly besieging Jim. Duty called and he had answered. Begrudgingly had he accomplished that which some faded youth prize could

have but momentarily considered. Some watchful commander and guardian of the shield-ended plate onto which readied engagement is acquired solemnly would never intimidate Jim. Some dubious purpose and muddled machinery slogging about bore no ill will, but neither did it satisfy. The room in which he had been sitting began to grow warmer, some well-sealed institution and would demand no less. Some temperate inability had always played upon Jim in a certain conspiratorial manner. Attemptingly of forcing him away from this less-than-welcoming continental misdeed and which might eventually have its way. Jim's thoughts vacillated in some wildest non-vague manner, between that which he had attempted and those ideals for which his ancestors had ventured out. Gone over in tacit disgust of one's own non-consideration, meeting point man-against-fellow-man and all the while attemptingly disguised in some most proper human form. Jim perhaps had not been able to see things so clearly as the others, and his life birth may have arrived too late and at too high a cost. Still, in refusing to acknowledge that which warranted no acknowledgement afforded him some patent satisfaction. Who dare be so bold as to suggest that anyone had refrained from doing their very best? He might have assumed the gentleman seated to his right to be in some inconspicuous line, telling of a rather tenuous relationship between government and the general well-being. Jim rose from his chair and while trying hard to avoid any errant glance. Lest the gentleman think Jim to be unduly parochial in his manner, self-conscious demeanour left no room for a smooth stepping out. And Jim flung open the door with some newly acquired self-assuredness and wanting to get on with the business at hand.

—Will I be waiting much longer?... *¿Habr  que esperar mucho m s?* asked Jim, and again pressing his forehead to the plate glass.

— *El sargento bajar  por ti dentro de diez minutos.*

Ten minutes would be an eternity to Jim. He was inclined not to re-enter the room from which he had just emerged. And stepping outside once again might have meant being besieged by some wanton disdain for this course so unapologetically decided upon. Hence, Jim began to alight upon things once more removed from his present consciousness. Clip-clop horse recollections momentarily re-emerged, entertaining Jim and temptation ran past some desire to re-live the experience. Garnered track turned round might have spoken for a pleasanter circuit of light equestrian exercise, delightingly in some faster comeback and screaming through a more delicate form. Early morning rehearsal for some larger space routine, bringing on and turning up some mudden feats of form and wonder. Light fantastic sounds glowing over some wretched pane finely founded had called to mind one sunny afternoon residingly on Yonkers fare. Knowing how and when to strike on to a solid finish, photographic telling of a winning beast championed beneath some gilded saddle. Jim recalled how his own father might partake of one finer afternoon, clip-clop alighting on some slightly mischievous intent. Hard work habits would at times be left to languish on a faithful dock. Resentingly of some supplementary responsibility and in such manner which tended to savour one's own life reward. So it would have been with Jim but for some arduous weight over which he could exert so little control. Looking back had cost him dearly. Time consuming accoutrements filling up time past with their incessant call for a fairer start. Out of a gate and sprinkled youth upon some lust love of wealthy burden gone forward, into a soul reckoning search of ripened awakening. Jim recanted his none-too-precipitous attitude, cunning in its anonymity yet stepping out through the

glass door once again. Feeling some now ripening matinal soup against his face only reinforced the notion that his world was firmly at odds with some more even-tempered anaesthetic mindset running about. The usual morning condensate had disappeared five or so minutes earlier and Jim stared down at its frost intent. Wet pavement black and staring up watchfully made him bring into full realization the need for complete disclosure, some inherent need for prompt recapitulation and trying to make sense of one's youthful need for the creative. Jim himself had once considered some literary undertaking. Weeks of churning out some tiredly veiled expressions, some poor substitute for senseless guitar melodies ill-perceived, misplaced windows peering back into one's own soul search disappointed inevitably. Thinking back and mingled in between reins of laughter saw one coming home in strange satisfaction. Thinking back and putting all that was seemingly digested into one or another closed capsule of crème-coloured moment satisfied. Jim had enjoyed playing music as a boy, its fleetingness being all too eager to disappoint. Garage music sounding out through some old accordion instrument pleased throughout years of passing yarn, woven along in some chaotic fabric ne'er perceived until lateness gave speak to one's own dying breath. Spoken over and over, slowly at first but then gaining in some somewhat formidable show of overwhelming advance delightedly. Jim would have revelled anew in his unexpected treasure. Playing three-by-four around some dissonance tone-space opened up one's future art possibility. Relaxingly in closed sleep nesting, comfort endured and with grudging wind-blown bass, tones alighting beneath some scratchy melody, custodian to one's inherent inability foremost but warning of some larger stop. Some organ instrument leaping out of Jim's recollection momentarily but then surrenderedly beneath strains of hang on. Standing near some chartreuse perfumed veil of soulful endeavour caught Jim and then returningly in joyous flashback of some musted recreation space in easy recline. Backbeat foot-pedalled in some numbered return unintended, some cold jazz future might await and hurried Jim's present mind back to one's sweetest recovery. Continuing to tempt and finally, young girls dancing beneath some middle class amazed and urgently onto some erstwhile music formation. Pleasanter intentions would not cease amid some darker result, but neither could they flourish. Wet pavement continued as some later morning motion impressed and pressed on. Non-uniformed servants quickly directed and urgency determining some new daily course became ridden upon one's steadily rising sun awareness. What had become of Jim's early morning trial? Again gazing upwards brought down some granite façade view, white whisper brush strokes higher above and expectingly of this final wait prelude. Some higher looking and imagining some distant covering, Jim's soul filtering into the vast ether and becomingly of one's own fading mortality. Some high blue sky and Jim thinking still about a fate which might yet exercise its greying grasp upon one's already wayward identity.

Some resonant voice was heard to summon him in, and Jim rebounded. The sergeant had indeed appeared, and Jim again took refuge within events determined, sacrificial mind inhalation and peace-of-mind temporarily redeemed. He followed him closely, loathe to disrupt any implicit relationship freshly-attended-to and trying to withstand any errant cold profession stare which might be encountered along the way. Jim continued to alight among friendly fare unpursued, stepping softly upon newly waxed fusiforme readiness and anticipating of some certain compelling free-form vision. Impeccably kept and needing some cheerful task implied greetings out-of-hand. Some professional layman appearances still lay canvass to Jim's imagination and having all but given up on any sterner army endeavour reconciliation. The sergeant returned Jim's identity card, gestured him into a room at the end of the hallway and

abruptly disappeared. A fine classroom it was. Some carpeted rectangular grey contrasted sharply with the crude barracks to which he had last been assigned. Were these students to be like all the others? He had expected a number of them, yet there appeared just one. Some moustached gentleman in his fifties, not wholly unpretentious and with a gaze at once demanding of some authority-driven need to comply and generously given toward those in his command. Surely he had been well-skilled in the quiet elocution necessary for bringing forth from a silent faithful. But it was all in the background for now as Jim's recurring retreat took on its newest turn, ill-timed events again negating one's own life ambition. He, too, had once expected much of some well-earned devotion. They who had long ago entered into some bright new world would have expected it of him, too. He had been awaiting the arrival of some class-filled candidature, those wishing for some sudden idiom enlighten. Old-world patterns and predictions forsaken in much the same way as could be explained by Jim's own common lack of events foreseen. Events as chaotic eruptions one upon another continued to present Jim the pretext for bathing himself within endless hours of self-examination. Justification lost for all that had occurred and certain destiny notions dwindling away amid the twists and tangles of everyday life. Jim stood alone. As some well-fulfilled gentleman completed the compass to which he had aspired. Then standing eye to eye, words still restrained beneath some mutual need for quiet self-congratulatory achievement, and extending a hand toward Jim.

—Hello. I am Virgilio!

—How do you do, said Jim.

He was startled by the man's enthusiasm. It was not as though he had never seen anything like it before. It just rather seemed grander than most and more demanding of some even more extraordinary response, uncondescending nor did it strive to confuse.

—You are Jim? Viriglio asked.

His voice seemed to rise and fall at the same time.

—Yes. Are there any other students?

—No. This is a *particular* class.

—... *private* class....umm...

Jim began wondering aloud as to Sanchez's instructions.

—I was told that there were to be...

—...yes. They said that you think...*think, thought, thought*...thought it is a larger class. Miss Sanchez is confused sometimes.

Jim could only concur on this point, albeit reluctantly so long as he needed to be in her employ.

—Vir., said Jim.

—*Vir-HIL-io ...* You know *El Infierno*? he asked.

Jim thought for a moment before feeling sure. He continued with a wry smile.

—Virgil. Yes, of course.

Jim had never read the book in its entirety, although he was reasonably sure that his new student had.

—So this is a military installation? asked Jim.

—Oh, yes.

Despite his high level of certainty as to this, Jim had been becoming confused steadily over the course of the morning. For while the guard house would clearly point to some military connection, Jim had not seen anyone in uniform (his present student included) nor would he have had any reason to suspect that civilian issues here were to be at all subjugated to some royal command.

—And to whom am I speaking?

But Jim was obliged to rephrase his question.

—What do you do here, sir? Are you military or civilian?

—I am a military colonel. I am *the responsible* here.

Jim was impressed. While the errors in usage were typical, Virgilio's responses offered some completeness quite refreshing. Besides, he had only come to teach as high as *comandante* in previous military classes and such a challenge might at least pretend to hold some fleeting distraction for Jim. The colonel invited him to sit, and they both did so. It was clear from the outset that he would be disposed to however Jim wished to proceed. Unlike Dolores, who would be too preoccupied with some furtherest delusion of self-grandeur, the colonel seemed to be a rather humble man.

—I've been waiting downstairs for some time, and I'm not sure how much time we really have left this morning, said Jim.

He figured that Sanchez's level test would now seem ludicrous and decided to forgo the whole thing. Jim had already gotten a pretty fair idea regarding the colonel's capabilities. One quickly learned that such formality, despite Sanchez's bent to the contrary, meant little and still less when dealing with private classes.

—I am sorry for the wait. The security here is very *hard*, and with many more papers... *papaleo* as we say.

Jim thought he might just as well try for some more information, Sanchez's instructions notwithstanding.

—What exactly is this place, colonel?

—These are the intelligence services. Where are you from, Jim?

—New York City.

—New York! Good! exclaimed Virgilio.

Sanchez had been right when she told Jim that any discussion regarding the installation would tend to be discouraged, for Virgilio had quickly changed the subject.

—Have you ever been there, colonel?

—No, never. But I would *like*.

—...*to*.

—Yes, said Virgilio.

—No ...would like *to*.

He saw no reason not to try and utilize the time they had remaining. Virgilio's blank stare only encouraged Jim back to some whiteboard explanation. Wire-rimmed glasses peering into one's own puzzled novel protagonist took Jim back to some literary adolescent Tuesday. One which could only be appreciated over these many years henceforth. Higher responsibilities sought after and for some more proper interpretation of the bard, nobler past reverence duly-rendered would provide Jim some earliest lifelong appreciation of that which could only comfort through some more secular vision, religious undoing and gaining in some more adequate interpretation of bell and steeple. Walking through some sunlit high school camp, afternoon match athletic against some rhythmic drumbeat would alleviate the need for one's temporary learning gratification. Listening to some cold wind echo and searching out one truly pristine form brought over from another place. Seasons undisturbed, warmer green amidst some softest adolescent attraction might pull one along properly, some more gently perfumed blue sky dwelling offering a bridge across one's most stubborn forlorn existence. Emptiness sought-after and prized for the remuneration it had presented unfailingly — scholarship as definitive death knell. One Saturday morning drive askew had nearly provided Jim some pre-emptive escape never ending. He began poring over the usual invitation pattern: *to, it, one, some*. Indefinite article demanded one in appropriate response dumbfounded at times, some offering and uncountable putting forth quantities innumerable. To it assignedly in definite resignation would inevitably bring Jim back to some action evolving, softest dream gazing out through one plate glass commutation and hurriedly toward one's own life examination. Some stopped motion request would never be granted. And just how he might someday encounter that object of eternal adolescent invitation would continue bringing Jim back to that particle, longed after but left forever, untreated and eternally smitten. Some universe coveted and unrequitingly so.

—O.K... Yes... I would *like to*.

The colonel seemed satisfied.

—Last year, we *go* to Virginia, he continued.

—Past tense, sir?

The colonel's expression became increasingly tense.

—...*went* ...We *went* to Virginia.

Jim could not have imagined a more unlikely visit. In any case, he now began to ponder some usual reconsideration regarding excessive correction. *They do so easily discourage!* Sanchez's advice had seldom been in vain and, as much as Jim disliked having to admit it, some new improved *tête-a-tête* was usually encouraged.

—On holiday, colonel?

—No, no. It was a conference ... F.B.I.

Jim recalled some lone sentinel amidst morning dew, security camera faintly foretelling and dissolvingly into some civilian frame reference. Purposeful military lapses had indeed implied some newer pedagogical forum. All the same as it was to Jim, yet slightly more moving in its occasional glint and pretext for some mid-level imagination intrigue. Sinking ever deeper into some pathos implied increasingly more searching out of opportunities slighted, sequences lost. And lost and still lost amid some incorrect continental drift, misconstrued setting forced upon one's own academic ideal. Jim could barely recall an inscription etched squarely in the limestone face, clearly sited acronym upon which he had relied as reference to his early morning arrival. Only later would Sanchez come to give passing mention as to its meaning. And under no circumstance was Jim to discuss with anyone as to why or how he had had even the slightest cause to frequent such a location.

—I don't suppose there's much time for fun at something like that.

—Working all the time. But at night ...drinks!

Drinks thought Jim. Sitting around some suburban lounge, cheap inn attraction and attempting to call in and over some time travel, tired longing for some elusive boredom as tender interlude. Freshly cut Virginia lawn essence marking off the passing moments of one's own home-displaced sensibility.

—Well, colonel, I'd suggest we do a real working of the interrogatives in upcoming classes. They are so important for good communication.

—Of course. You are the teacher!

As was common in these types of situations, Jim had no real intention of beginning anything of substance during their first encounter and was merely begging for time.

—Were you able to function well in Virginia?

—...function?

—Yes ... speak and understand...communicate.

The colonel gestured delicately with a slight-left forehead turn and frenzied brow. The pause struck Jim as being far too long for any response he could possibly wish to make.

—*So- so.*

—How do you mean, sir?"

—The written texts are usually given at these conferences. This was not a very big problem for me. But later ...speaking outside ...much more difficult.

—At drinks, for example?

—No, no. We drank whiskey. *American* whiskey ...No problem!

Virgilio let loose with some cannon of a laugh. So much so that Jim began to panic at not being able to remember his next question. Although not to worry, for the colonel quickly picked up where he had left off.

—The accents were sometimes difficult to *listen*.

Jim was now determined to forgo any pedagogical interruption. Besides, the colonel was beginning to betray some slightly pained expression, as if trying to gain sympathy from Jim.

—I spoke with many Americans in Virginia, but I can understand you better.

—Well, that *is* surprising.

—I like listening to different ways of speaking, he said. I can remember jumping with many different nationalities.

—Jumping?

—Yes, *padachute*.

Some persistent *r* becoming *d*, and within some insistent Spanish phonetic had always been an insurmountably difficult task for Jim. He had never pretended to be an imparter of English pronunciation, nor would he. Phonetic charts and the like would always be better left for those stronger minded travelling types, implyingly of some

territorial advantage better marked by those more properly skilled in the art of running over and over, some *ad nauseum* issue pleading for quieter resolve . He would marvel at those English boys gathered at the breakfast place on Serrano, conferring about some odd diphthong properly intoned, yet dismissive and filled with abundant disregard for all that they had come to misrepresent vis-à-vis some lighthearted willingness to mislead.

—That does sound exciting, colonel.

—Oh, yes!

—When did you do that?

—I used to command the ... how do you call that...the 4th Airborne Division. But before that, I was in the international peacekeeping force in North Africa for four years. Exercises and more exercises. Very hard. The heat was very strong, but I learned to speak some English.

—Was it difficult jumping out of airplanes, colonel?

—No, no. You could do it, Jim!

The onset of some eerie pause seemed to prevent Jim from enjoying the colonel's last remark, nor getting some chance to respond before Virgilio made it clear that he had been considering something else.

—At night, it was a little more difficult.

(silence)

—How could you see where you were falling? asked Jim.

—You couldn't!...could NOT!

(silence)

—That must have been dangerous, murmured Jim.

Jim thought to test Virgilio's past modal comprehension, and now acting on Sanchez's pre-course briefing. To Jim's surprise, he proved to be quite good.

—Well, it was really very funny.

—Funny?

—You couldn't see any of your partners as you hit the ground. Only hearing *aargh...uurgh....aargh...*

Virgilio grimaced in feigned discomfort several times in rapid succession, and suggestingly of what it would have been like to be in that situation.

—Well, that doesn't *sound* very funny, colonel.

The two continued to sit in silence with Virgilio just gazing, as if still enjoying some memory long gone, youth having faded forever into that dark night.

—Do you still jump, colonel?

—Yes, but not so much.

His tone belied some certain regret, and Jim would be prone to return the conversation to its original vitality.

—How much English did you learn?

—Little, but it was the only way to communicate. It was okay most of the time.

—Were there any problems?

—Sometimes with the air traffic.

—How was that?

—Someone controlled traffic speaking English, but the pilots were all *from* different nationalities, and most speak ...*speaking, spoke, spoken* ...spoke no English.

A huge smile appeared over Virgilio's face.

—Getting *into* the sky was more dangerous than jumping back down!

Virgilio again let loose with one of those laughs befitting of his rank and demeanour. The situation must have bordered on the comical, and some North African international undertaking been his forever thought-out path back to where we might have all liked to remain.

—Well, I think our time is up for today, colonel.

Having had spied the colonel's watch, Jim decided it was time to conclude.

—And I should say — very, very good speaking!

He gave Viriglio not one, but two enthusiastic thumbs up. The colonel beamed in delight and they both rose from their chairs.

—Very nice meeting you, Jim. I see you again on Friday?

—Yes. See you on Friday, sir.

—I can show you ...

—Thank you, sir, but don't bother.

The colonel smiled and permitted Jim to take leave and back out into the corridor. Jim was almost certain that Viriglio would have disappeared through an exit at the far end of the classroom, leadingly onto some quarter space reserved for official business. He himself began by making his way back along the linoleum floor hall. That he would like to have a drink of something before leaving the building occurred to him, thinking slowly and then in consideration of some later morning blind. No desire to go beyond some first task had always been secondary to that of one's initial morning sense, expectedly so in laying waste to some precious dream sleep. Still, some later lack of fluid morning resolve, fluid imagination recedingly along some deep chasm matinal relief frightened. Panic wrought upon one lonely figure cowering and looking upwards against some hardened gaze, artificial halo pressing downwards onto one's own metaphysical sense of dread and despair. What would Jim do next? Halo off some sleek new track, newly polished luster trying to urge Jim onto some more positive outlook and again reminding of just how carefully kept this place seemed to be. Jim would soon tire of such antiseptic settings, viewing them ever more so as mere assaults upon his increasingly chaotic life. Viriglio, too, might have fallen prey. Some suburban physical light orchestra could have been just what the colonel had needed at that moment in his deserved career. Out-of-tune wind instrument calling forward, trying to breathe some life into one tired bunch of souls accompanyingly, notes shrilled against some cheap construction material, fire hazard legionnaire matter unthought of until it would be far too late. Life coincidences taken for what they were and offering some trivialized meaning would soon prove too much for the colonel, as they had for Jim. Until all consciousness of having forsaken the bell and steeple rising high above some parochial rendition confirmed that Jim's sense of dread had indeed returned. At some point between his final explanation and taking leave of the colonel, it had again blossomed into some unexpected inescapable palpitation.

Jim came to via some mechanical sound which he could only interpret as being that of some overworked piece of equipment, copies churning forward at rapid pace. It occurred to him that he had some materials of his own which could be prepared for Viriglio's next class, though beats in slashing succession had once meant more to Jim than some mere soundtrack of a career path gone wrong. Once leading Jim down some strewn city pavement, some cosmopolitan life pulse pointing Jim down 6th Avenue and toward some upper west village. Some sensation lacking only in its inability to thwart one's inevitable return amid shouts for withered belongings, early workday release and hoping to engage some far off exotic entail in order to momentarily calm Jim's then youthful lust or aspiration. He would have moved accompanyingly along some 14th St. existential paradise, touching on that which only he could know or understand. Sellers of cheap merchandise would have left him unawares. Leadingly onto some work-floor space would usually bring him in for one quickest glimpse of she who were destined to become his truest love, or was it just some figment of one's ebullient imagination? No one could ever say for sure that some such confluence of noise and ideas had ever been able to firmly secure some sounder future passage for one lone and tired civilization. Jim was certain that it had done so. As had one smaller garrison of kindred souls whose shared inborn incapacities would reflect some equally skewed desire to excel at that which some better fortune might have afforded. And here

was Jim. Amidst it all and soon willing to forfeit the lot to some uncertain roll of the dice. Some irrational return to the continent from which his father (and his father before that) had ventured. Sunlight shining down brightly through some early twentieth-century pane and casting a shadow upon Jim's new world inheritance. Foreign birth leaned over heavily into this wayward song, and in it Jim felt sure that his was to be a fate of tireless assimilation improperly taught. Out and into a sea of windswept youth were not to last forever, and leaving behind the shores of their forbearers, darker characters fading into one another boldly and ambitiously. Indeed, it would seem as though he had come across the copy machine and wondered if some benefit might be sought through its proper use. He fancied helping himself as he had done so often in the past (former military administration exempted) and clearly put and stated plainly had required no further countenance from some higher authority forbidding such use, pedagogically or not. With nothing pressing for the remainder of the morning, and considering of some ever present pre-class concern — inexplicable though it was — Jim decided to investigate such a possibility. Drawing nearer to some contrite red glow, he peered into the open room. Having now grown silent upon someone's end succession of papers copied and filed, it implied no mystery. Neither did it intrigue Jim that no one was observed to leave through the actual copy room door at that moment, for as had been the case when taking leave of the colonel some time earlier, occupants might tend to spend and disappearingly so within exits and entrances at opposite room ends, implying of some other goings-on or to some more proper building space utilized efficiently. Jim thought he might just as well see how much he could complete before being found out. He had not been given any specific instructions since arriving, and the personnel had seemed cordial enough. He pulled from his well-worn bag two neatly placed and well-presented sheets of exercises. Interrogative comings and then so would be some welcome instance for a student like Virgilio, well-motivated and not akin to causing any inquietude from which Jim could never recover. Edging toward the copy machine suggestively held his imagination at bay, twirling daisies upon red and white carnations daring some adolescent angst to reassert itself festively. Some cheaply prepared invitation done over in black-and-white misrepresentation had always disillusioned Jim, for he would have always imagined so much more. He had lately come to regret some youthful oversight, some ne'er knowing nor being precisely sure of what there could have been undiscovered within one's own singular adolescence. Gently lifting some broader plastic palette presumed some more determined effort, copies produced effectively and in well-numbered succession. One, two but then it seemed as though someone had been let onto Jim. No sooner had the first set been completed than a short, portly gentleman approached quickly from the open doorway.

—Perdón, señor. Se prohíbe hacer fotocopias por sí mismo.

The man spoke with some sense of urgency, and only confirming that Jim had guessed correctly regarding some lack of approval for performing such an insipid task.

—How can I get these done? ¿Cómo se puede hacerlas?

He explained very carefully to Jim that any materials for copying should be left with the floor officer, fully upon one day's notice and being accompanied by clear explanations as to number and format of copies requested. But as the man spoke, Jim

could only consider that, like a comet spent along some futile path through an ageing universe, he could feel nothing but cold. Frozen sensation putting forth page after page of mind numbing information reflectingly and bespeaking of one's very own ne'er timely insignificance. Verbs and adverbs tumbling about and searching for one kinder context within which he might take some comfort. One, two and then more of the same could be cause for concern at some other level of consciousness. But within Jim's self-inflicted misplacement had become tantamount to some lack of ideal, principled fault of the thinking reactionary which he undoubtedly was. So long ago had cast him into some transatlantic sense of time immovable. So long ago and how much longer would he be obliged to make mirror of some youthful reflection so tolerantly. Contrasted against one present picture framed in paler shades. Eight-by-eleven rebuke to one's own daily sense of struggle, and resultingly in some more bemused expression displayed helplessly. Rhythm in time going on and what was once so agile at interrupting some such patterned recourse had been rebuked by Jim. He listened to his interlocutor with neither mind nor contempt. The rules and regulations had been carefully laid out and Jim could only stave off some shrinking self-satisfaction via one's own steady stream of ill-recognized naiveté. Compliance rendered across some thinly stretched sense of dignity would continue being the call of the day.

—¿Dónde se puede encontrar a esa persona?

Jim was told that the floor officer could be found upon entering the next-to-last door before reaching the lift and then back toward from where Jim had just been. Mind sounds beckoning him out and moved translucently still, yet within some slower motion progressing steadily toward the lift. And more forward still until striking fast to some hardened image, some face set in stone. As if petrified by years of unyielding servile still-life and moving in adjacent to Jim, for there appeared the tall grey-haired gentleman and remindingly of the room in which Jim had been waiting for the sergeant. Still, he might have attempted some sort of gesture at that moment. Some clearer picture might have persuaded Jim that this surely was someone he had once taught at the telephone switching station in Orense Street. Jim seemed to recall one ubiquitous involvement with some computer analyst, never hurriedly nor impatient and with a particularly calm demeanor. Sleeping barely through hour-long sessions, one-on-one didactic reinterpretation of some preliminary lesson completed would have put Jim to amongst his most difficult of tasks. Staring blankly and with ne'er the slightest smile, betrayingly of some somber routine daily practiced, this tall grey-haired gentleman seemed to be well-versed in the art of deceiving. He would have temporarily coaxed Jim out of some incidental excitation, one lingering arousal over some softest still which could have languished on from within some semi-hidden female form, some tenderer fantasy which had mesmerized Jim in his previous lesson. The gentleman might have well resulted to be Jim's illusion of his very own, some former capability surrendered and given over to what it is he was now doing and would always be. Some phantom of what the past had once promised but, as his coincidence with the gentlemen, incomprehensible and fictitious to the end. Now straining to ascertain some connection between this gentleman and the intelligence headquarters at which they presently found themselves might be folly, or matter little. For while Jim had long been prone to entertaining himself through the unlikeliest of diversions, some widening *divertissement* rarely satisfied and would never commit to having clouded one's already taxed sensibility with such unwanted hubris. He continued toward the office door offering

neither greeting nor confirmation. Once there, it became clear that creativity was again becoming lost, some running headlong into one's own immediate lack of ingenuity would prove to be too depressing for Jim. Sadly he gazed down at the task he had still to accomplish. Listening to the floor officer rattle off some procedural shift courteously, repetitive of that which he had just been and gave him food for thought — some interrogative exercises which he had managed to begin copying might well be supplemented with a few merrier details from Sanchez's material. As if upon some participle unbending, *-ing* in some unordinary present mode would be starkly revealing of some purer function, given over from some long lost sea struggling to make sense of foreign tongues one after the other. Some more ambitious turns of phrase might just provide the allure which the colonel had found so lacking. He hurriedly marked off the pages of interest and placed the workbook on the floor officer's desk. He was duly assured of some prompt return and came about satisfied and resolute, then looking forward to one's own later morning resolve.

Jim came to just as he once again crossed out into the corridor. Pale hard haze again poundingly of some hurtful artificial light overhead, projecting downwards and encouraging Jim onto some quickest exit. He faintly recalled there having been a water cooler just opposite the lift, and adjacent to the general stairwell might offer him some alternative to pressing on with this unduly long experiment, some overly detailed mediocrity and wilfully within the career of this once promising individual. He had momentarily considered passing through Sanchez's office on his return. Some sleeker notion enticing him as *she* would be well within her morning routine by now. The receptionist had continued to dance pirouettes around Jim's wanting imagination, and some easy access down and around the inner belt might have set forth one's daily dose of advantage taken. How it pained Jim to be walking down this corridor and at this particular moment! Just when the smile upon Virgilio's face might have given larger to some more prized objective, beyond the point of ever being able to find some path back to that faint glistening which one calls home. Jim came across the water cooler as he had expected. A quick stop and then across to the lift would bring him back to the ground floor. Resting his bag down while bending his knees so that his left forearm was at some equidistance to the spigot, he removed one small plastic cup. Feeling some slightest pressure under his left thumb and with sounds stirring this ever present time remaining. For the corridor had once again enshrouded Jim within some virtual silence as some quiet intermezzo from above began to serenade, some sounding downward and scornful of his own time accumulated. Some strangest serenade from above, one which he had certainly not encouraged and some melody from some other era seemed to catch up with Jim. He waited impatiently for someone to enter the corridor, so that some scolding insinuation might be diluted or, better still, prevented. But it was no use, for he again found himself alone. And alone continuing on unabated into the better part of his own earthly decline. Listening passively and in some anxious await to his own quickly spent youth (as if that could ever materialize). Jim certainly recognized the tune. It was not as if some cheapened arrangement, overdone reminder of Jim's own slide into this jaded turning backwards had ever been cause for confusion. Yesterday and gone today, reflections on love lost belatedly and then regrettingly of some misspoken gesture turned considerate. Going off about some faraway trouble and being here to stay would foresee the enigma to which Jim had fallen prey. Some temptation grew within Jim to sing along out of some chastened respect for that which bore his signature reflection, tidying up some fast-approaching mid-life angst which would have to be confronted now or later. Having discarded the cup from which he had been drinking and decidedly upon some newly chosen endeavor, Jim crossed over to the stairwell and began his ever

increasing descent to the ground floor. The desk officer might not be there now, having been replaced by some more untenured figure. Jim emerged at the bottom of the stairwell and looking at the doors which led back into the foyer, the sergeant crossed quickly in front of him and faintly acknowledging Jim as perhaps being amongst that last of species, thankless warrior struggling to uphold those tenets of necessary scholarship. He suddenly realized clearly as to Sanchez's cold insistence on conditional structures: *secretive communication*. Words uttered as Jim was again considering whether he might have been tricked into giving in to all of this. He crossed briefly through the foyer toward the principal door, nodding slightly toward the desk and making his way down and out onto the sunlit pavement. By the time he had returned to that gaping relief through which to begin some brief ascent back to his car, Jim was feeling decidedly disappointed. Later morning bathed had not proven to be late enough. His day would be far too long, and it left no alternative but to continue searching throughout those agencies and academies for which he had grown to harbor nothing but ill will. He noticed that the morning sentinel had also been replaced, though whether temporarily he could not say. Considerably less fortunate than her predecessor, she would be left to deal with some later matinal rush, personnel and incoming delivery calling on the sentinel to harness some of her harshest of military courtesies. Jim would be content to remain on the outside, pointedly headed back and up toward the curb. Turning sharply through the iron gate revealed some high sun spreading out over one greenly dotted plain, and might have swept Jim well across and through to some central mountain rising up from within the Guadarrama. Emptiness would again be the rule of the day, except for one pleated cry, some greeting intoned through a warming wind from atop some passing gilding — *¡hola, vecino!* — and caught Jim's ear remindingly of one earlier morning rush, clip-clop sensation having been brought back to Jim. He cannot have been expected to know how to respond. Nor how or why this particular gesture should have succeeded in assuaging some latent sense of *déjà vu*. Some precipitous outburst might have been made too late, and reflecting of all the years Jim had had to endure. He had never been able to react in time, and today would be no different. Still, he tried to return something worthy and with a warmth genuinely intended. Could Jim have been mistaken all along? Might this seemingly insignificant exchange have been telling of some more tenuous bond between old and new? Some cooler temperatures would now urge this slothened day forward, and as sounds he had held dear began to grow faint Jim got back into his car. But he could not figure out what to do next. Still lying off at distance, Casa de Campo laying down before what had now seemed to be something still less impressive, within some steadily declining downtown silhouette and rising sun belittling this entire panorama. Finding his way back would pose no problem. He might even find himself benefiting from some later morning rush, some gravitational mad dash into the city center. Some daily promise of teeming enterprise might become useful, and if not for the folly it posed in his mind Jim could imagine himself becoming fully engaged. He had little more to do than follow some steady crush of vehicles, some traffic being sure to delay but with some destination secure. Jim had often been chided for some occasional reliance on certain purpose at the expense of minutes lost, as if some decision to again pass through the head office were to present him with even some subtle reward. Then coming into the local streets demanded some more surrendered relaxed feel, plyingly of some willingness to let oneself be manipulated by, ridden about within some circulatory pretense. Rules written but rarely reinforced would complicate some more urbane mix of people and machine. Some flagellating human insignificance would thwart those confiding in one's own more charlatan undertaking, street vendors hawking and clogging the streets of Madrid

with some finely resolved discontent, and leading Jim to consider whether some present course might have been correct after all. Jim's return had brought him inevitably down Castellana and past Sanchez's office. Still, he persisted in his decision to turn onto Serrano and in spite of perhaps another missed opportunity, some prior life redemption again denied. Miles and miles of stone throws would oversee the sharper realization of one's own prolonged mortality. Prolonged travel breadth extending and never reaching some final destination. Prolonged treatment over some poorly mapped-out path and long before any reasonable birth remedy could occur. Jim arrived, and noticing that there would be no place to park his car wondered if he should try and find one of those small out-of-the-way establishments. Privately owned parking garages at the disposal of non- and not-so-regular customers alike, some soiled basement restructured, convertedly upon the urban practicality to which it served. Such impossibly fitted spaces thrown open would often persuade Jim to abandon his stricken vehicle, only to be delivered onto some introspective jaunt along one crowded avenue. When Jim emerged out onto the street, he broke off with some quickest left and back toward Serrano. He was careful to avoid crossing over to the north side of the street and which would have brought him into some uncomfortable proximity with the breakfast place. Some English boys' tide and torment would only add to his already failing disposition, as the morning had been considerably more trying than Jim's initial meeting with Sanchez had foretold. The wait had wearied his nerves even before the colonel could afford him some reason for holding strong. Nor would Jim find it necessary to cross over, for the head office remained deftly at hand, some length-placed city block might offer him a chance to wind down. Some length-placed offering providingly of one's own pre-paternal feel, and proffering him a chance for winding down. A chance to stop and reflect upon one's own ritual calling back, shade street side protecting and showing him some means for winding down. Some none-too-faraway switching station had begun to play tricks on Jim's mind. Wound down subconscious feel and then again as the tall grey-haired gentleman replaced some swifter moving onwards, forward motion letting until Jim could walk no further. Some empty bench at the corner provided him a much needed oasis, some clouding reminiscence again tending to subdue Jim quite contrary to the frenetic repulsion which always proved so futile.

Jim had been at the telephone company for only a short time. It was arguably the drabest and most dehumanizing place he had ever to attend. In fact, it seemed to enshrine every last bit that Kafka could have imagined. Some ever-present corporate sentinel, unnatural light producing incandescent pale meant to at once hypnotize and sub-render. Always dissuaded from volunteering even some slightest piece of personal information would obligate them to stumble through some well-rehearsed litany of why and where. Jim had usually had a bit too much *caña* by the time he got in just around 3:00 (due none so much to anything but some comforting gaze more and more appreciated and afforded him by the early afternoon barmaid). He would usually forget his foreigner identification number but not so at the telephone company, where some newly-acquired light-headedness actually emboldened him to fumble about for no reason other than momentarily. Some moment cast into a lifetime, riding the high seas on one's back with the sun and sky pulling one away in aired reassurance. To which at once drab and dreary he would return. Seeing his current location in some state of interminable disorder, Jim might have descended to the basement to have a quick cup. He knew that from there he could ascend through some back staircase and come up round to the place at which he could finally set down his notepad. Once in place Jim would immediately begin to feel uneasy, as larger buildings in Madrid were usually overheated in wintertime and poorly ventilated in summer. Coal furnaces and whatnot

running through his mind, some rationalization, then the hum and buzz of some overhead illumination contradicting his most ardent attempt at justification. One by one they entered in automaton manner, saddened and in search of some most singular intermezzo in relief. Some briefest freedom from the drudgery they were made to endure daily, some language lesson earned worthily, phrases of varying length turned strikingly without regard to gender or number. He would rarely stray from the plan he had prepared for the day, perhaps out of some genuine concern for these poor creatures of information circuitry. Some switching two, line-after-line conversation call up would tend toward some logistic hidden well within. Jim could not imagine a more fitting predicament, and regular textbook exercises could not suffice for such strange-hearted creatures. Entering passwords upon bold keys strikingly and given through seas of information, they would always wish to overachieve and shunning of any ill-advised transformation into alumni boasting of some possession of higher knowledge. Onward and upwards toward some democratic ideal and turning away from one steeple pointing warily toward Amsterdam. Scholarship attempted and abandoned, mocked by some more computer-driven vocation and insisted upon some more rigorous assault on purity of being. When Jim had finished with his first group, some brief pause would be prelude to his next class. Perhaps descending once again to the basement for a quick cup or some slightest flirtation, outside for some still quickest breath of air to frustrate some inner stifling which would have gotten hold of Jim. He would be grateful for the time out. The main entrance would by now be well-shaded and he could appreciate some sharper delineation cutting through the plasmal ether over which defined Orense Street at that hour. Some further half-bathed side in early afternoon light challenged one's directed gaze, some shaded transition seeming to turn back light on its own. Some haze sunlight silkscreen stretched provocatively and in defense of the beer bar he had foresworn some moments earlier. Some obscured hallucination as it now would have appeared to Jim. He might have been able to make out faintly some reluctant customer in quick retreat, some sun punishingly of a daily routine moving forwards. Some none-too-happy tiding pressed firmly into the pages of this one typical Spanish afternoon. Jim would usually pause as he re-entered the building and with some more prolonged gaze down as far as the eye could see: might *he* ever be able to retreat into such an urban horizon? Or would he be doomed to tow this line he had chosen so carelessly? He would now bypass the security guard, darting straight for the lift and arriving to the fourth floor. Something less generic was immediately appreciated as the doors opened. Something telling of an office more highly held, regardingly of some more steadfast responsibility and less gloomily elaborated. There must have been some reason why Jim's next student would be afforded this private class and in such an appropriate venue. Though tall in stature, he presented a somewhat nondescript appearance. While not seeming to be much older than Jim, some disturbingly greying feature opened one up to the possibility that some well-chartered endeavor had taken its toll, unexpectedly so and demanding far more than he could have ever imagined. The gentleman always spoke highly of his profession, and likewise of his tutor's though the cruelty of such patronizing was never likely to go over very well with Jim. Nor would he ever convince Jim that it could constitute the sole source of his imminent survival. He nonetheless became one of Jim's best students, and it wasn't before long that he would confide in Jim regarding even the most personal of issues. Some lingering conversation would turn to family matters, and once lamenting that it was primarily due to his being an only child that he had been obliged to squander promising youth on nothing but books and career preparation. For this reason, Jim's theory as to the tall grey-haired gentleman's twin sibling could not be further from the truth, and he continued to believe that he had

surely been recognized at the intelligence headquarters. Why this gentleman should have twice slighted Jim continued to puzzle. Once in the waiting room and again in the corridor as he went about arranging for Virgilio's copies, and might have inspired some peculiarly imaginative alighting. Some fantastic symphony and filled with one's own furthest delusions. Jim again refrained from indulging and began to wonder as to just what this untimely recollection could have served. Perhaps it was Jim's pervasive insistence on finding some easy link between places and events, people and things which might result in some useful going over, temporarily relieving him of the debt which he had so arduously accumulated. Some momentary release from the costly rebuke that he would be obliged to consider for the rest of life. Now some high white granite cathedral spire which had been Jim's once lone source of hopeful respite continued to remind. Some slightly wider shadow now mocking his somewhat uncomfortably warm repose, and in contrast to the narrower shade relief within which he had found himself on the previous morning. Stevenson often remarked that the sun in Madrid had been her sole source of inspiration in refusing to succumb to the tribulations of ever going back home. Scholarship moving further away and bringing of some harshest luminous armour now pressing down upon Jim. It would be another hour before this perpetual feast rose unforgivingly over the steelen girders of some mighty expanse curling out and away from the Nether Land, some magnificent timepiece beckoning those moving forth in some eternal anticipation.

Jim sat looking at the pavement thinking all the while that this can't be why the child arrived one morning into the bay, whose father might have looked back at the darkness of its character and decided to continue on mindfully, reassuring the child and all the while with the sky and the bell and the steeple. Seeing the sea out in front of them and never asking why. Just staring and sitting, looking at the pavement thinking all the while that this is how the child must have arrived one morning plaintively. Oh, that unimaginably young boy with the wind and sea in his eye! They had looked back at the darkness of its character and never wondered. A steeple rising starkly, high above the bewildered going about their seemingly endless string of chores and responsibilities resignedly. When upon by chance entering to sit in silent reproach or grateful confession one might suddenly realize that it, too, had been given a chance to survive, to be useful to more than a hungry few. Some far away bell calling to those who would have otherwise forgotten to submit to the trappings of church unyieldingly, far removed from the structure above, oblivious of sky and complete reign of personal fulfilment. A bell aching in its tired position of perpetuating the myth that its calling is one of history's great enterprises. Sleek overtones shimmering upon deeper tones still, casting a lasting decrescendo over the smallest receiver of vibration untemperedly. A mighty instrument made waste by the very song that it intones, and in doing so reminds us that the steeple is steadfast in its readiness to outlast the lingering refrain. Church...Steeple...Sky... This can't be why the child arrived. This can't be why all those others had lost themselves in the painful crush, the hurtful moan of a generation yearning for the prize which seemed to be unceasingly denied. Within that for which it was given the credence of a dubious God, it ventured a chance to be useful. And so it has. But I often wonder if I have, or even if I might have ever indeed been able to. Where it meets the sky is the point from which we should all begin. Perfect union of temperament and chaos, complacency and despair. Church ...Steeple ... Sky ... This can't be why the child arrived! And how so evident it had been. Whereby the bell became still and as its tone continued to resound smaller and smaller the steeple itself came to grow mute by its very posture – standingly and quite resigned to frame the servile instrument for which it was constructed. And Jim gazing high above to the

meeting point, awe-depleted foundation long ago stricken presented its sacred portal. And as I sit and paint over these words, depiction of a church which might still serve as ancestral burial ground. The little boy judges hard and with unyielding drive. A still-life made colder by the white grey canvass of time moving slowly onward. Little patience for the undecided few and the bell awaiting, in silent anticipation of the next.
