

Order and Flux in Northampton

David Foster Wallace

BARRY DINGLE, CROSS-EYED PURVEYOR of bean sprouts, harbors for Myrnaloy Trask, operator of Xerox and regent of downtown Northampton's most influential bulletin board at Collective Copy, an immoderate love.

Myrnaloy Trask, trained Reproduction Technician, unmarried woman, vegetarian, flower-child tinged faintly with wither, overseer and editor of Announcement and Response at the ten-foot-by-ten-foot communicative hub of a dizzying wheel of leftist low-sodium aesthetes, a woman politically correct, active in relevant causes, slatternly but not unerotic, all-weather wearer of frayed denim skirts and wool knee-socks, sexually troubled, ambiguous sexual past, owner of one spectacularly incontinent Setter/Retriever bitch, Nixon, so named by friend Don Megala because of the dog's infrangible habit of shitting where it eats: Myrnaloy has eyes only for Don Megala: Don Megala, middle-aged liberal, would-be drifter, maker of antique dulcimers by vocation, by calling a professional student, a haunter of graduate hallways, adrift, holding fractions of Ph.D.'s in everything from Celtic phonetics to the sociobiology of fluids from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, presently at work on his seventh and potentially finest unfinished dissertation, an exhaustive study of Stephen Dedalus's sublimated oedipal necrophilia vis à vis Mrs. D. in *Ulysses*, an essay tentatively titled "The Ineluctable Modality of the Ineluctably Modal."

Add to the above Trask-data the fact that, though Barry Dingle's spotlessly managed franchise, The Whole Thing Health Food Emporium, is located directly next to Collective Copy on Northampton's arterial Great Awakening Avenue, Myrnaloy has her nutritional needs addressed at The Whole Thing's out-of-the-way, sawdust-floored competition, Good Things to Eat, Ltd., the proprietor of which, one Adam Baum, is a crony of Megala, and add also that The Whole Thing is in possession of its own Xerox copier, and the following situation comes into narrative focus: Myrnaloy Trask has only the sketchiest intuition that Barry Dingle even exists, next door.

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For Barry Dingle, though, the love of Myrnaloy Trask has become the dominant emotional noisemaker in his quiet life, the flux-ridden state of his heart, a thing as intimately close to Dingle as Myrnaloy is forever optically distant or unreal.

Suspend and believe that the consuming, passionate love of Myrnaloy Trask has in fact become defined and centered as a small homuncloid presence inside Barry Dingle, a doll-sized self all its own, with the power of silent speech and undisguised ambitions to independent action. Barry Dingle's love sees itself as the catalyst that can transform Barry Dingle from a neutral to a positive charge in life's delicate equation. It sees itself as having the power to remake, reform, reconstitute Barry Dingle. In fact — since facts are the commodity at issue, here — Barry Dingle's love of Myrnaloy Trask wants in some ultimate sense to *be* Barry Dingle, and has lately launched an aggressive campaign to assume control of Dingle's life, to divert and even divorce Dingle from his seven-year definition as manager of The Whole Thing, from his hard-learned disposition to passivity and mute fear: in short, for those who know him, from the very Dingleness of Barry Dingle.

The birth of Barry Dingle's love for Myrnaloy Trask can be fixed generally at a present some two years back, when The Whole Thing, like the rest of the health-food industry, is scrambling wildly to capitalize on the American consumer's growing enthusiasm for bran. The precise two-year-old moment when the crossed eyes, healthy heart, modest mind and tame history of Barry Dingle consummated their need for intersection at the point of object-choice can be identified as the moment 4:30pm on 15 June 1981, when Dingle, arranging a cunningly enticing display of bran-walnut muffins on the recycled-aluminum shelves of The Whole Thing's display window, finds himself staring, as only the cross-eyed can stare, into the smoke-dark window of a Northampton Public Transit Authority bus, halted on the street outside by one of Northampton's invidious and eternal red lights. In the sunlight off the sienna glass is the muted reflected image of Myrnaloy Trask, next door, outside Collective Copy, in her denim skirt and Xerox apron, editorially scanning C.C.'s public-announcement bulletin board's collection of fliers and hand-lettered ads, searching out the irrelevant, the non-progressive, the uncleared.

To see and feel anything like what Barry Dingle feels as he stares

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slack-jawed through his glasses, his store's glass, into the darkly reflecting glass of the frustrated bus, the student of the phenomenon of Barry Dingle must try to imagine the unimaginable richness, range, *promise* of the community bulletins before which Myrnaloy establishes herself as culler and control, the board aflutter with bright announcements, Establishment-opprobrium, introduction — bids for attention from kyphotic-lesbian support groups, Maoist coffeehouses, organic-garden-plot rentals, dentists who eschew all mercury and alum, obscurely-oriented political parties with titles longer than their petitioned rosters of names, sitar instructors, anorexia crisis lines, Eastern and Mid-Eastern expanders of spiritual consciousness, bulimia crisis lines, M.D.'s in healing with crystals and wheat, troupes of interpretive tap-dancers, holistic masseurs, acupuncturists, chiropractic acupuncturists, marxist mimes who do Kapital in dumbshow, typists, channelers, nutrition consultants, Brecht-only theater companies, Valley literary journals with double-digit circulations, on and on — a huge, flat, thumbtack- and staple-studded, central affair, sheltered from the apathetic vicissitudes of New England weathers by a special Collective Copy awning. The board is the area's avant-garde ganglion, a magnet drawing centripetally from the center of town on the diffracted ions of Northampton's vast organizational night, each morning bristling brightly with added claims to existence and efficacy, each late afternoon edited, ordered, wheat-from-chaffed by Myrnaloy Trask, who stands now, reflected in the dun shield of the bus glass, snake-haired in the June wind, one nail-bitten finger on a shiny leaflet of debatable value or legitimacy, deciding on the words' right to be; and at this moment, 4:30pm 15 June 1981, she brings up behind herself her left leg — in the bus window a distant right leg — bends it at the pale knee to effect the ascension of an ankle, pulls a sag-laddered wool knee-sock tight up the back of a white calf; and the movement, the unconscious gentle elevation of the thick ankle, is so very demure — reminiscent finally of the demure elevation of Sandra Dee's own sturdy calf as Gidget kissed interchangeable emmetropic young men in the climaxes of all the interchangeable Gidget films that informed so much of Barry Dingle's childhood — the movement so very young, tired, unselfconscious, sad, right, natural, reflected, distant, unsexily sexy, slatternly erotic ...

... so very *whatever*, in short, that off the bus' window and through the TWT display pane and Dingle's thick hot angled glasses the parallaxed leg-image tears, rending Dingle's sense of self and

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place, plunging with a crackle of sexual ozone into the still surface of the stagnant ankle-deep pond that defines at this moment the Dingleness of Dingle; and through the miraculous manipulations of primal human ontemes too primal and too human even to be contemplated, probably, it gives birth to life: from the clotted silt of the uninterestingness at the center of Barry Dingle there emerges the salamanderial zygote of a robust, animate thing, a life, Barry Dingle's immoderate homunculoid love, conceived out of the impossibly distant refracted epiphany of Myrnaloy Trask, demure in her now-not-fallen socks, a Myrnaloy who is as unaware as carbon itself that she has effected the manufacture of life through her role in the interplay of forces probably beyond the comprehension of everything and everyone involved.

Northampton is located on the northern fringe of Massachusetts' Pioneer Valley on the eastern edge of the Berkshire Mountains. To the south lie Amherst and Springfield and Hartford CT. Incorporated 1698, Northampton is the eighth-oldest township in the state. It is the home of Smith College for Women. The college's Congregational Church, still semi-erect, saw the 1711-1717 delivery of the Great-Awakening jeremiads of dentist/theologian Solomon Stoddard, in which the reverend foretold the world's cold and imminent end, characterizing that end as a kind of grim entropic stasis already harbingered by, among other portents: poor nutrition and its attendant moral and dental decay; the increasing infertility of modern woman; the rise of the novel; the Great Awakening itself.

The city grew to economic prominence in the late eighteenth century after more space was cleared for development and commercial intercourse. Space for development and commercial intercourse was cleared all over the Pioneer Valley by the British commander Lord Jeffrey Amherst, who in 1783-84 won a telling victory over the sly, putatively "peace-loving" native population by providing its tribes with free blankets, each carefully preinfected with smallpox.

Northampton today enjoys the nation's second-highest percentage of homosexuals, calculated on a per capita basis, a distinction that has earned the city the designation "The San Francisco of the East." It also enjoys the nation's sixth-highest percentage of homeless persons, again per capita, countless capita to be seen each

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winter night clustered around the tattered flickers of countless trashcan fires. Most enjoyable of all is the nation's lowest percentage of registered Republicans, with the brow-raising total of exactly zero within the corporations limits.¹

Fact: certain unlucky persons exist as living justifications of those phobias peculiar to mothers. Barry Dingle is such a person. His childhood, his whole life stands darkly informed by Mrs. Dingle's failure ever to be incorrect. Examples range through the history of the man. The tiniest pre-dinner treat does spoil little Barry's appetite. The briefest exposure of his unrubbered Hush Puppies to rain or snow ensures, with mathematical reliability, disease. The dullest of sharp things wounds, the safest of playground games injures, the scantiest inattention to oral hygiene sees the dark time-lapse sprout of an instant caries.

The Barry Dingle who dislikes drinking milk, avoids it at all costs, does fail to grow up big and strong like his sister, a field-hockey prodigy.

Also a fact: certain persons, especially mothers, come in time to resemble more and more closely their automobiles. Mrs. Dingle is outdated, rust-chassis'd, loud, disposed to the emission of fumes; she is wide and rides low and has a poor turning radius; but she is ideally suited for the transport of much baggage, and her mileage is phenomenal.

Picture her, then, entreating the child Barry Dingle never, never *ever*, to cross his little eyes. She believes, with the complete conviction of the phobic mother, that the child who crosses his eyes Stays That Way. She cajoles, enjoins; the indoctrination's movement is as broad and slow and irresistible as the Dingles' station wagon. The orientation of his eyes becomes for the little Dingle an object of black fascination. He dreams, in the night's dark part, of his eyes crossing by accident, their paths never again to diverge. He avoids sighting on any but the stablest objects. He resists the natural urge of the child to look down at his own nose. With Mrs. Dingle riding herd on their mutual neurosis, Dingle treasures the clean binocularly of his sight like a never-miss aggie. He makes it through fifteen

¹For much more here see W. Deldrick Sperber, "The Sensitive Community: Nutritive, Sexual and Political Ambiguity in Northampton, MA," *Journal of American Studies* in Sensitivity, v.IX, nos. 2&3, 1983.

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years of exquisite temptation without so much as a retinal wobble.

Fact to be feared: the rebelliousness of fearful youth, no matter how momentary, can itself be a fearful thing. On 15 June 1961, Troy, New York, enraged by the imposition of a domestic sanction soon lost to memory, Barry Dingle stands before his mother in the warm checkertiled Dingle kitchen and gives in to the terrifying, wonderful temptation of the ultimate transgression against natural and maternal law. The cross is delicious; his eyes roll toward each other with the sweet release of catharsis long delayed. Two Mrs. Dingles scream and raise four arms skyward, pleading for intercession against the inevitable....

Cross-eyed Barry is shunted from specialist to specialist. As Mrs. Dingle tearfully predicts, they are powerless to help. For six binary, true-and-false-filled months Dingle veers, bumbles, bumps his way through the doubled system of peccatum and punishment he has wrought. Finally, December, Buffalo, an optician at technology's cutting edge fits Dingle with an elaborate pair of glasses — thick angled lenses that catch and reorganize the disordered doubleness of things into a unity that fuses at a focused point several yards in front of Barry's own ruined apparatus. Relief is purchased, at a cost: the glasses work, unify, but objects for a bespectacled Barry now appear always twice as far away as they in fact are. Smaller, more distant. So that for twenty years Dingle has chosen minute by minute between doubleness and distance, between there being, for him, exactly twice or exactly half as much as there really is.

The point here being that a key ingredient of Myrnaloy's allure for Barry Dingle, and an irreducible constant in the sensuous half-equation whose sum is the immoderate love that even now makes its move for control of Barry Dingle's present and future, is the fact that Myrnaloy must always remain either fundamentally distant *from* Dingle, or else doubled, and so unreal, *for* him. Meaning that the 'real' Myrnaloy Trask is for Dingle not even a possibility: he is in the (not unenviable?) position of a man able to *want* without the disturbing option of ever truly being able to *have*. Hence a classic, almost classically static romanticism as fundament, primal element, precondition for the very experience of being B. Dingle.

Additional fact: Mrs. Dingle predicts, long ago, over vermouth, that love will someday make Barry Dingle hideously, hideously unhappy. This too is come. Dingle is, as it were, beside himself, in a state of utter emotional flux whereby up and down, good and bad are as indistinguishable as right and left. Here, though, it is necessary to

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distinguish between the happiness of Barry Dingle and the happiness of his interior homunculoïd love. Barry Dingle's immoderate love is itself happy as a clam. It thrives, grows, gets off on the existence of a telos at once right next door and horizon-distant, at once really one and apparently two — in short, of a love-object invested with all the flected ambiguity that makes Romance itself possible.

But one last fact: Barry Dingle's love is nonetheless a human love. With the illogic that defines all autonomous but entombed emotional homunculoïds, Dingle's immoderate love is possessed of a desire for the attainment of the very love-object whose fundamental unattainability is that love's animating breath and bread. It is by nature dissatisfied; and that dissatisfaction is, via the hermeneutic circle of love's illogic, its life and mission. It needs Barry Dingle to appropriate, possess, use and encompass Myrnaloy Trask. It harbors in its doll's heart a desire for a strong new Dingle shell, the outward instantiation of an immoderate inner force. It envisions Dingle capturing Myrnaloy's heart and fashioning inside her a demure-calved homunculoïd of her own, a love for Barry Dingle that will, in the union of Dingle and Trask, merge with the homunculoïds themselves and render them complete (i.e., no longer animate, inside). A genuinely human emotional armillary, Dingle's immoderate love's life strains ever forward toward the death that love's life loves.

Think of it this way, Dingle, says Dingle's love as Dingle inventories herbal teas on a May afternoon, 1983. Think of your love as being by nature an incomplete, questing thing. I was born in you half a love. My end is the unity I am by definition denied.

Dingle is silent over ginseng and camomile.

The homunculoïd taps its foot patiently. The point, it says, is that I've got a nature to be true to, just like you. I'm compelled by this nature to spend my time, therefore our time, questing and striving for my other half. This is so, no matter how much you buck and snort. Think of me as a chivalric knight, you as my dragon. And obversely. Each other's torments, but also our salvations.

Salvations? Dingle says. Dragons?

You give birth to a love in Myrnaloy Trask; she forms her own half-a-love homunculoïd, curved, gentle, round-faced, doll's eyes that open with the pull of a heartstring, concave where I am convex. You do such a thing; Myrnaloy gives birth; her half-a-love and I get together; I leave you in peace. Everybody's a winner. *Verstehen-Sie?*

And the toe-problem? whispers Dingle, biting a cracked lip.

Your toes are once again your own psyche's own, says Dingle's

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love, making its presence felt with a playful twinge in one red Dingle digit.

The fact of the May '83 matter here is that Dingle's love, as of some six weeks past, has decided to play psychic hardball. It has moved to consolidate its authority over Barry Dingle by focusing its attention and influence on Dingle's most vulnerable parts. Here these parts are due south of even the most sensitive dangling chinks in most men's armor. They are the tortured ingrown toenails of Barry Dingle. (Possibly worth noting here that Mrs. Dingle was and is a fanatic on the subject of foot care.) Barry Dingle's love is using the curved culcates of Dingle's nails, together with the tender genital/emotional complex that birthed the immoderate homuncloid in the first place, to force an intrinsically passive Dingle toward some decisive romantic action.

Love has turned the order of Barry Dingle's life into flux; Dingle is now at war with himself; divided; schismed; finally wounded, behind the lines.

Yes cross-eyed Barry, thirty-five, perennial wearer of leather sandals, bell-bottoms, and Central American ponchos, high of forehead, long of incisor, thick of spectacle, is in possession of 2 (two) feet presently in torment from the negative-reinforcement regimen of his immoderate love. Since adolescence (specific moment of origin coincident with that of the optical transgression), the toes have detracted from Dingle's quality of life: corticate yellow nails curving in of themselves, sinking into the tender meat of his red toes, the toes taking turns at self-harm, swelling, shining with erumpent infection, to say nothing of pain. Dingle, of routine, takes all possible preventive steps. He trims the nails daily, paring them straight across, leaving perfect planks of protruding cartilage into the corners of which each morning he tucks tiny cotton pellets soaked in camphor and oil of clove. Sandals, affording the toes movement, oxygen, freedom from pressure, are worn at all times. In cold seasons Dingle even forfeits the privilege ever of being taken seriously as a person: he wears sandals with socks.

Now for naught: B. Dingle is literally staggering under the incurving influence of his immoderate love for Myrnaloy Trask. The love, from its central facility in Dingle's clean red heart, now commutes daily south to an annex in Dingle's clawlike nails, from which annex it makes its presence, wishes and directives acutely known. The campaign is insidiously subtle, the pain carefully gauged to impel cooperation without ever quite causing incapacitation. Barry Dingle's

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love begins moving against his feet in April 1983. By June, Dingle knows something must be done. Myrnaloy Trask must somehow be appropriated, Dingle's cherry-colored homuncloid completed, sated, silenced. The love has worn Dingle down — two years of flux and now two months of rampant ingrowth: his tortured feet, his keening heart the disorder and disruption of the neutral Dingle equation are driving Dingle quietly toward breakdown and tilted stasis.

Cf he has become unable to concentrate at work. He becomes lax, his employees demoralized, intransigent, carbohydrate. The owner of the whole The Whole Thing chain pays a personal visit, 2 June, to the Northampton franchise. He takes a significant look at Dingle's blackly circled cross-eyes, his well-chewed lip, his obscenely swollen feet. The owner straightens his suede vest and fingers his Scientology medallion. He advises Dingle in no uncertain terms that he, the owner, knows that things here at the Northampton facility are on the decline. That sales have been slipping, that freshness is on occasion being compromised, that TWT's employees, not to mention Northampton's health-rabid customers, are losing a focus for their nutritional vision. Even the bran, he says pointedly, though not without a smile at his own wit, lately isn't moving like it should. He asks Dingle what *he'd* do, in the owner's place, here. Dingle's love, from deep inside him, puts in its own two cent's worth — an electric thrill of pediatric pain. A pale Dingle removes his glasses, sets his jaw. He reassures the twin images of the owner. Things will turn around. The store will soon be back on its feet. Seven years of careful management; passionate devotion to the marketing of health; the dingy Good Things no competition: he waxes briefly eloquent, an aggressive sincerity that surprises the owner and distracts even the bloated TWT employees from their game of rummy. The owner eventually nods, acquiesces, checks his sundial and makes for the glass doors, leaving in his cinnamon-scented wake a system of insinuations that both reaffirm and cast doubt on his faith in Barry Dingle. The store is silent; a halted bus motor can be heard at the traffic light.

For two unprecedented sick-days Dingle stays home, brooding, his feet in hot salt water and eucalyptus. Nigel, the assistant manager, temporarily assumes The Whole Thing's helm. Dingle communes with his love. With himself.

The result of which is the prenominate realization that something must change, coupled with a robust new determination really, truly, finally to act. After two days (date now 6 June 1983), Dingle leaves

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his bath, returns to TWT's many windows, and resolves, with a coldly febrile set to his tall forehead, to set his unsteady sights on the distant Trask and to bring her, by fair means or otherwise, swimming into his romantic ken. His homunculoid love smells the metal smell of strength in Dingle's blood, and approves it. It loosens the grip of Dingle's own nails just a bit. It encourages Dingle, exhorts, plays interior good-cop bad-cop, says it discerns in him a nascent newness, a courage,

Courage! says Dingle's homunculoid love, defining the term in Gothic script on Dingle's heart as a willingness to bring the comfortably distant into a unified proximity, to risk stasis as completion. The words pump against the fishwhite skin of Dingle's shallow chest and appear on his body in faint pink calligraphy. Dingle reads himself double in the night's salty bath. Touches the blurred words.

The fly in the emotional ointment here being the initially-mentioned Don Megala, eternal student, dulcimer-*craeftig*, whose connection with Myrnaloy Trask, visible through Collective Copy's window via the reflecting umber glass of the ever-halted Northampton bus, is undeniable, though ambiguous — Megala being in his heyday an epic drinker and chaser of skirt, both the denim skirts of Northampton's straight female leftists and the tartan skirts of the aesthetically-inclined Smith College set whose poetry readings, madrigal recitals, and sherry-and-scone mixers Megala haunts, earning himself the designation *Der Döpplebanger* by Smith's artistes-in-the-know — and Myrnaloy being shy, withdrawn, clearly inexperienced, and, even more clearly, deeply ambivalent about men.

It is now appropriate to note that Barry Dingle and Don Megala enjoy some slight acquaintance through the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, that Megala had been going through the motions on an abortive sociobiology dissertation while Dingle completed his undergraduate studies in Digestive Science, that they had had in common a mentor and advisor — one W.W. Skeat, a socio-digestive biologist best known for his thesis that the underlying and true cause of cancer is in fact plain old human saliva — and had both done substantial research under and lab-assisting for this mentor, advisor, Skeat. Noted further is the fact that Megala regards Dingle with the jolly condescension reserved for the cross-eyed, buck-toothed and

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sock-and-sandal-shod, while Dingle, lately under the emotional aegis of his homuncloid love, harbors for Megala a mute dislike, an active wish to do him harm, from a distance.

Megala being the fly in the ointment of romance vis à vis Myrnaloy, it is understandable that Barry Dingle, whenever the opportunity presents itself, arranges to observe Myrnaloy and Megala together — not actually *following* M & M, mind you, given documented eye-and mobility-troubles, but rather just arranging to be located, inconspicuously, wherever they are likely to appear together.

Opportunities for such observation are not few, Myrnaloy and Megala to be seen by Dingle variously: sipping four-dollar espressos at Northampton's Leftward Ho Cafe; strolling hand in hand through any one of the city's fifty-six used-book stores; waving a shared banner at weekly allies of the Northampton Anti-Nuclear And Non-Aligned Nations' And Neighbors' Alliance, Myrnaloy having been recording secretary of NANANANANA since its mid-seventies inception; exercising together on the town common's public aerobics palestrae; etc.; and, of course, variously talking, confiding, nuzzling, arguing, being ambiguous, all in the bus-reflected Collective Copy window.

Not to mention patronizing Adam Baum's own Good Things to Eat, Ltd., The Whole Thing's chief sit-down competition, a tiny-windowed establishment which Dingle, incurring substantial professional risk, begins inconspicuously patronizing as well. Picture Dingle, in early '83, hunched, poncho-swaddled, his cotton pellets grimed with the floor's sawdust, in a Good Things booth as M & M establish themselves over a whole-grain dinner at their usual table directly behind him. They are deep in conversation. Barry Dingle and his immoderate love listen. Myrnaloy seems just to have finished pouring an ambivalent heart out to Megala on the subject of men and sex. Dingle's ears are aprick, his carrot cake hardening and peppermint tea chilling, untouched.

Myrnaloy, on the last leg of a redditive narrative journey, is revealing, fragilely, with many stuttered pauses, that she is terrified of sex. Thoroughly terrified. She alludes to some shadowy long-ago trauma, some betrayal, the details of which Megala, judging from the sympathetic and reinforcing soft sounds he keeps making as he chews, already knows. Barry Dingle's love gnashes its teeth at Barry's not knowing what Megala knows. Myrnaloy's voice is trembling; she is revealing that she is, at thirty-five, flower-child-past and all, still

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technically maiden. She states that sex holds a great, albeit undefinable, terror for her.

Don Megala gives Myrnaloy Trask to understand that he understands, that he regards — nay, *genuflects* to her attitude as one more than just understandable, don't you know, but as somehow deeply sexually-politically *correct*. He reveals that he lost his own innocence at fifteen and has been terrified ever since. That he lives in sexual terror. That sex is, by nature, terrifying.

To Dingle's horror he finds himself in significant agreement with Megala.

But what Megala is about here, Barry is roughly told, is clear. Yes Dingle's love smells impending seduction. Dingle searches through his angled glasses for some reflecting surface in the restaurant, anything in which to study Myrnaloy's facial reaction to Megala's inevitable upcoming arguments. He imagines her looking down, rouged with self-revelation, dabbing at nothing with a recycled napkin, smiling hesitantly, gratefully, at Megala's understanding, his willingness to share a vulnerability. Yet it's the willingness-to-share gambit. The homunculoïd establishes itself in an orbit of impotent rage around Dingle's carved heart.

Because But wonderful, too, Megala is going on to muse out loud. His voice is pocked with the tiny hesitations of purposeful sincerity. Sex, Megala means. Even the terror of sex is, in fact, wonderful, in a terrible sort of way.

Dingle envisions Megala's delicate white hands covering Myrnaloy's delicate white hands. Dingle is pale, helpless, staring into the distant fossil of his dinner.

Because sex also being, let's both be honest with ourselves and admit it, a pretty big thing in this predominantly short and unhappy life, Megala adds. How sad it would be to depart the coil without taking, as it were, a look around at life, to see what's what. Surely sex is one of the big whats in life, to be at least looked at, no? Or so he tells himself, he tells her, whenever his perfectly appropriate terror threatens to get the best.

Dingle envisions clean binocular eye-contact between M & M.

And it's hard to think of a more *natural* thing in this life, Megala muses out loud, than intimacy between a man and a woman who share mutual concerns and respect and correctness. Who *care*. No? A natural, natural thing. Like the coruscating flora of autumn. A cotton Nehru jacket dried on the line. A bird wheeling before a stiff gust. And, irony of ineluctable ironies, are not the very most *natural*

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things in life often the most terrifying? Does ... *could* Myrnaloy share this feeling, this insight? This sad, wonderful, terrifying irony?

Dingle hears Myrnaloy make a gentle noise variously indicative of: agreement, gratitude, admiration, the recognition of something unseen that's been recognized *for* her. Dingle's love twirls, staring balefully at its blurred reflection in Dingle's clean pounding courage-scripted heart.

There is the violent sound of Megala vacuuming the bottom of his glass with a straw. Each of Dingle's eyes contemplates its reflection in the other.

An absolute scuttling mink, hisses Barry Dingle's love.

Pardon? whispers Barry Dingle.

This guy is a sterling example of a mink, says the homunculoid.

A mink?

A technical term for a certain kind of low-rent player in the love game, the love says; 'Mink,' noun, meaning basically someone who's smooth on the outside, but inside still basically just a weasel.

A smooth weasel?

The guy is minkness in motion, says the love, and here we sit, inert. It goes for a shiny metatarsal's tip, in the sawdust.

Megala and Myrnaloy exit Good Things. Dingle can finally see them, far away, through the cashier's little round window to which he's half-run, limping. They are detaching the leash of Myrnaloy's Nixon from a Good Things leash-hook. Disappearing in a direction opposite that of Collective Copy. Leaving behind a slim trail of Nixon's digestive distress.

The following couples grapple into the wee hours of this early-June night: Myrnaloy Trask and Don Megala; Barry Dingle and Barry Dingle's love.

Fly-ridden ointment or not, recall that Barry Dingle has, as of 6 June, reoriented himself, that the needle of his emotional compass now points, shakily or not, toward the pole of action. Action number one is taking place right this minute, on the morning of 6 June, as Dingle sits at his fiberboard TWT desk, absent his thick glasses, composing an advertisement for a new line of wheat germ with coconut and date-dust mixed right in. He hand-letters a flier outlining nutritional virtues and introductory discounts. He finishes flier, caps magic marker, submits flier to Nigel for the correction of doubled letters

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and incongruities of scale, and lets Nigel edit while he, Dingle, drifts pensively through the store's bulk-aisle, past broad side windows, past clean sunwashed plastic trashcans brimming with granolas, past nuts, dried fruit, protein powders, bran-barrels, trowels, degradable baggies, scales, to The Whole Thing's frontal display pane. In the window of the idling bus can be seen Myrnaloy, fetchingly distant at the control of her Xerox behind the CC customer counter. The arched-bridge-esque figure of Nixon is to be seen ranging over a spread-out pile of invalidated bulletin-board submissions. Against the CC counter leans Don Megala, flushed and shiny, speaking out of one side of his mouth to Baum, the Good Things proprietor whose fliers enjoy, through the influence of Megala, a consistent place on a Collective Copy board whose facilities Dingle has never had the gumption even to request.

Nigel pronounces the flier clean copy. Dingle finds the thing in his hands, alludes to a vague problem with the copier in The Whole Thing's stock room, and says perhaps he'll just whisk over next door to Collective Copy. Nigel mans the TWT con while Dingle embarks on what is possibly history's slowest whisk, three wide elliptical passes at the copy center's entrance, last-second veerings, sudden reversals of flight at the compulsion of the homunculoid, who has only to feint at Dingle's sandals to get its point across. The closure of ellipse number three sees Dingle pass under the bulletin board, fumble between the old wooden door's two apparent knobs, glom finally on to the genuine article, hear the *ching* of the customer bell, and enter the lair of M & M. The place is hot, full of the dry chemical wind of roaring copier and rattling automatic collator. Flier in hand, Dingle steps over the tortured figure of Nixon and makes for the customer counter.

Baum having decamped at TWT's approach, here is Megala, alone, under his arm a used copy of Stuart Gilbert's *Ulysses*-guide. Megala greets Dingle with broad enthusiasm, extends a doubled hand. Dingle hopes very much he won't be clapped on the back. Smells of cork and yeast exit Megala's mouth; his eyes are red as certain toes, a filigreed road-guide to the state of post-lunch fermentation he now enjoys. Dingle's tense smiling cheeks spasm as two Myrnaloy's leave the copier and approach; Megala has called for a look at this flier of Dingle's, here. Myrnaloy Trask is close. Two denim skirts, two work-shirts the pale blue of tired laundry, Xerox aprons, four knee-socks. Eyes and forehead framed in tiny dry wrinkles and squeezed in a kind of tight pain against the hot June window-light, but Dingle can

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see only two milky facial outlines that resist resolution or rapprochement. A customer enters, as does a unit of spring wind, carrying to the counter the rich smell of Nixon. Megala wrinkles his nose, reaches across the pitted counter for what appears to Dingle as the twin-towered facade of a Bass Ale.

Megala, with a flourish, introduces Dingle to Myrnaloy. Her hand is white and delicate, if a bit unsoft. Dingle's tongue is dry meat in his mouth. Myrnaloy acknowledges Dingle as somehow connected with The Whole Thing, next door. Megala outlines Dingle's curriculum vitae for Myrnaloy. Dingle brandishes the advertisement, requests copies. Costs are negotiated, specifications specified; Myrnaloy retreats to her machines. Nixon sniffs with ominous interest at Dingle's sandals.

Megala comments on the weather, the bus, the lager, the Laffer Curve's impact on the whole-grain and dulcimer trades. Largely without punctuation. At least two of his three sheets are flapping. Dingle can tell, standing here at the counter, fingering the collar of his poncho, that Myrnaloy is still within earshot, despite the roar of Xeroxes, from the unmistakable way Megala directs his voice to the wide empty parqueted space between Dingle and Trask. There are twine-gnarled subtexts here to which Barry is not privy: Megala's loud voice is making Myrnaloy strangely tight-lipped; Dingle watches her face expand at the sides. His love tightens the screws on a digit, shrieking silently at Dingle to act, to speak, reveal something of himself before this woman and her mink of a beau.

So I see you have at least one Stuart Gilbert, there, under your arm, Dingle says to Megala. I guess I'll assume, he says, that the Stuart Gilbert you have there under your arm is material for a dissertation.

Assume away, says Megala, who's been counting heavily on the source in question and is now disappointed, to say nothing of pissed, to find that Gilbert's work on what Megala keeps calling 'The Big U' is just a reference guide, not an analysis — original, as opposed to recapitulatory, scholarship is not a Megala-strength.

Assume away, he says; worthless, though, the man vastly over-rated, important implications overlooked, mere surfaces scratched, Dedalus's oedipal psyche stands unrevealed, the metamorphosis from young artist to Telemachoid heir a blank, his dead love-object a scholastic deletion.

So a challenge, then, says Dingle.

Or a study in futility, smiles Megala, less wryly than he means to,

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eyeing a red triangle on the Bass bottle in some sort of thousand-yard expectation.

At this point Dingle finds himself staring at the images of Myrnaloy Trask bent reproductively over the photographic strobe of the copier. He makes certain observations — mute, internal, lyrical — about her breasts, which happen to be budding almost geologically against her worn work-shirt; about the hip-induced swells in her denim skirt; about the bristly shine of her white legs above the socks' wool. Standard metaphors are invoked. Now, in a gesture of thoroughly unconscious cooperation, Myrnaloy brings her right ankle up behind her and tends to the top of a tired sock. Dingle perspires freely. His eyes stare into each other over the bridge of his nose. There is a sinister protrusion near the hem of a certain poncho. Dingle shifts closer to the protective counter. Megala drinks at his bottle. Nixon diddles on a box of Hammermill bond.

Megala, soaring on the wings of futility's study, waxes nostalgic, collegial. He asks after Skeat. Dingle has not seen Skeat for years, believes him to be out West, living on grants. Myrnaloy glances through the flash of photocopy at the post-prandial foot-traffic on the sidewalk outside. Megala calls to her, jolly, regarding a Dingle-anecdote, set in the UMass research laboratory of W.W. Skeat, an incident dated 1968. He says the incident concerns Dingle. Dingle's immoderate love whispers encouragement. Myrnaloy's eyes register what could be called interest. Dingle clears his throat. Two Myrnaloy's move through blinking mists toward the counter, the copier on automatic pilot. Dingle tells.

Picture this. It is 1968. Barry Dingle, burning the midnight fluorescence in the basement laboratory of Skeat, is bent over the special microscope he, Dingle, requires to fuse a slide studied into unified, eyelash-free focus. He wears a white lab-coat and thongs. He is using the microscope to observe the activities of some routine germs, parameciae, in a droplet of saliva from the mouth of a melanoma patient. The germs swim aimlessly around, engage in activities. Dingle observes them. Then, on a whim,

On a whim, mind you, he says,

he removes the slide from its clips, turns it around, reinserts it, and again bends to observe. He notes something curious in the movements of the germs at issue.

Megala belches, incurring the empathy of Nixon. Myrnaloy betrays distaste, looks back again at Dingle, who's still crowding the counter.

Dingle, in the past, in the lab, becomes excited. He turns the

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scope's slide again. Looks. Sure enough. The germs are swimming north. Not aimless. Not just around. North. Only aimless if seen from one angle. Turn the slide, the wily germs take sharp lefts and rights, head due north again.

Megala chuckles. Myrnaloy's four eyes are on Dingle, perplexed. North? she says.

Not just around, Megala says. The aimlessness only apparent.

North, Dingle says. They swim north. Sense the ephemeral pull of some deep geologic magnet. Heed its call.

North for the summer, says Megala.

Dingle manipulates the hood of his poncho. And the whole on-a-whim insight a matter of perspective, was what excites, he says. See? Look from just one angle: things seem aimless, disordered. Flux reigns. Change the angle: illumination. Pattern. Order.

His love whips a checkered flag downward.

Look at a thing from some variety of perspectives, Dingle says; input from let's say even just two completely different angles: see matters in a whole new light, potentially.

Northern expedition, ruminates Megala.

It was exciting, Dingle says quietly.

Except it was Skeat was the one who wrote it up, Megala says. Got himself a Guggenheim² out of it. Dingle here got no credit. Skeat gave him the academic shaft. The big femur.

Dingle smiles shyly. Credit not important. The insight itself important. Epiphany under cold lights. Beside myself with joy, that night.

The homunculoid thumbs-ups its approval, reclines on a shiny ventricle, polishing its fingernails against the front of its tunic.

Myrnaloy: And now you manage The Whole Thing?

Yes. Problems in terms of medical-school applications. Finances. Vision.

The Skeat thesis, laughs Megala. Watch what you swallow, Myrnalove.

The relevant Xerox grinds into automatic shut-off. Myrnaloy retrieves Dingle's original, hands him a stack of warm noisome copy.

Fine, fine copies, Dingle says, flipping through, willing himself not to squint. Myrnaloy punches up his bill.

Megala gestures over at the register. Why not let Dingle put one up

²See W.W. Skeat, "The Intrinsic Northern Orientation of the Paramecium in Neoplastic Human Saliva," *Principium Salivato*, v.2, nos 2&3, 1970.

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on the old board, Myrnaloy, he suggests, grinning. A quo for his quid.

Really a first-rate new product, Dingle stammers, gratitude and resentment toward Megala swirling together oily in his heart, which pounds. Excited about the chance to be part of, he says; happy to arrange a complimentary.

Why not, Myrnaloy says tightly, figuring tax.

Dingle's immoderate love senses tension between tight Myrnaloy and scabrous Don.

I sense tension here, it says. It takes care of Dingle's potentially disastrous poncho-protrusion so that he's free at last to leave the pelvic shelter of the store's counter.

Thanks, mutters a relieved Dingle.

No problem, says Megala. The inevitable dreaded back-clap descends; Dingle's small coughing fit is also quashed. Megala and Nixon head for the restroom. Myrnaloy removes tools from a double-locked drawer marked BOARD, heads for the door, Dingle and Dingle's love in emotional tow.

Dingle stands in sunlight before the complicatedly-colored bulletin board with Myrnaloy Trask. He is dizzy from the ripe distinctively feminine fragrance that surrounds this slatternly woman who is not unerotic.

Really a well-edited board, he says; admired it in passing on countless.

Myrnaloy says nothing. With practiced tweezes of a staple-claw she amputates a slick proclamation for a trampoline-a-thon benefiting the Quebecois Separatist Party, the final gymnast having succumbed June 4. Dingle's wheat-germ-and-dust notice inherits its position, is staple-gunned into place.

Dingle's own personal notice has been attracted by two professionally typeset, black-and-white notices that sit dead center on the board's prized eye-level row. The images almost focus. He squints, covers an eye, reads slowly, transfixed by the following flier's text:

**WANTED: MALE DOG, SETTER/RETRIEVER MIX,
FOR MATING W/ 1-YR.-OLD SETTER/RETRIEVER BITCH.
OBJECT: LITTER.
PICK OF LITTER TO SUPPLIER, MALE DOG.
ESTIMATED TIME NEXT HEAT, BITCH: c. JUNE 15,1983.
INQUIRE WITHIN, MS. M. TRASK, COLLECTIVE COPY.**

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That okay? Myrnaloy asks, stepping critically back from the TWT flier.

Appreciate it, croaks Dingle, half-strangled by an inspired homunculoïd's sudden appearance in his throat.

I'll try to get over sometime, try some of the germ.

Please do. On the house.

Myrnaloy goes for the doors. Dingle contemplates the boards.

Myrnaloy has paused at both knobs. She is looking at Dingle. Dingle sees her. She is a hydra, her dirty-blond hair a mess of muted light. Her faces assume an expression. Germs really know where north is? she says; swim there?

Dingle's smile is unforced, though complexly motivated. It turns out they do, he says.

I find that pretty interesting.

Me too.

And it was just an accident.

Pure whim.

She looks past him at the street.

I'll hope to be seeing you around the store should you at some; the new wheat.

She both nods and smiles absently, disappearing back inside, Dingle trying to thank her through the glass.

The board rustles in a sweet wind, a system of circled squares around a bullseyed invitation to mate. The bus revs at the traffic light. Myrnaloy's outline reappears on the other side of the CC machines. Dingle flops back to The Whole Thing, his bell-bottoms swirling. He is clutching the warm copies to a lettered chest heaving with the implications of what has passed before him.

An abridged history of the dog Dingle is now buying, late afternoon, 9 June 1983:

This dog, a three-year-old Setter/Retriever male currently in residence at Pets And More Pets, Northampton, is a fine-looking animal ...

Fine-looking animal here or what? says the toupee'd Pets And More Pets salesman.

Looks good from here, says a bespectacled Barry Dingle.

... and a potentially first-rate pet; with, though 2 (two) features that cry out for classification as Flaw. The first is an advanced case

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of ocular venerean substamus,³ a progressive atrophy in the ocular cavity's web of muscle that causes one of the dog's eyeballs to roll chaotically in its socket, making the dog look, more often than not, cross-eyed.

I sense an affinity between you and this dog, sir, says the salesman, dapper in a checked sportcoat and white leather loafers. He fingers a flea collar speculatively. Am I off-base? You feel some sort of affinity here by any chance?

Dingle considers the distant dog through his angled lenses. His homunculoid love lays low, chewing its own knuckle.

Think maybe I do, Dingle is saying. The dog, a veteran of uncountable near-purchases, scratches endearingly with one tentative paw at the bars of its cramped cage.

The second flaw represents the reason why the dog was originally let loose at rush hour along the Valley's busy Route 9 by his original owner, a scholar of Korean funeral pottery at nearby Amherst College. Information regarding this flaw is being withheld from Dingle at the professional discretion of the pet salesman, who is even now working at the lock of the dog's receptacle, flashing an uneasy smile at Dingle as the dog, freed, immediately lunges slavering at a Smith student who stands nearby, tapping on the glass tank of a comatose terrapin. The understandably withheld information: this three-year-old male Setter/Retriever suffers from a disastrous enthusiasm for the special scents unique to the privates of the human female; has proved untrainable, unbreakable in this regard; leaps without hesitation, snuffing wetly, up the skirt of any woman unfortunate enough to enter the unfortunate orientalist's home. (Imagine your own embarrassment as, say, cocktail host of a colleague and his wife, seated on divans, over gin, surrounded by somber dynastic thanography, trying to make polite conversation as the dog steadily disappears ever farther into the colleague's wife's nether regions, she and you and the colleague all too mortified to pull the dog away, since any such move would signify acknowledgment of what is going on, while what is going on signifies that the colleague's wife possesses genitals, with a scent, a reality the suppression of which is absolutely key to maintaining the thin veneer of civilization that separates the behavior of, say, you and the colleague from that of, say, the dog.) A more complete history would countenance the dog's repeated olfactory advances at the orientalist's feminist-ideogram-theorist

³See, for instance, photographs E. Dickinson, B. Streisand, J.C. Oates.

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fiancee, who eventually realizes, not without horror, that she is coming to prefer them to the pottery-scholar's own caresses, and today belongs to no fewer than three support groups. 1982: the dog is finally the object of abandonment, is found and saved, at rush-hour by a cruising abandonee-scout for Pets And More Pets, rather a more high-pressure pet shop than Barry Dingle would have preferred, but the only present possessor of a male S/R in the whole Pioneer Valley phonebook.

Also frisky, the salesman says, getting a headlock on the frantic animal, whose toenails scrabble on tile as the Smith student drifts off toward the venomous-reptile aisle. No shortage of *joy de vive* in this animal, the salesman says.

Definite Setter/Retriever mix? asks Barry Dingle. He eyes the distant, dull-gold dog writhing under a tiny salesman.

Word of honor.

Sexually mature? intact? Inclined?

As the day is long, sir.

Name?

No name. A nameless dog. Be creative.

The dog barks.

Price? Dingle asks.

Highly negotiable. Plus necessary canine paraphernalia thrown in, as well.

Done, then.

Thank you, God.

Excuse me?

The salesman is making for a cage-lined back room, dragging the dog by the scruff. Right back, he promises. Vaccination-checks, paperwork. . . Price-negotiations moments away. He shuts a heavy door.

Moments later Dingle departs Pets And More Pets with: one flea collar; one reinforced military leash; one bag food; one plastic crater of a dish; one set vaccination papers; one surprisingly cheap, covertly (in the back room) tranquilized dog, which trots grinning, stoned, next to Dingle, one eye on Great Awakening's sidewalk and one on his owner. Dingle heads for home, sandals and pants flapping.

Good man, exhorts Dingles immoderate homunculoïd love for Myrnaloy Trask.

Thank God, the salesman repeats for the benefit of Pets And More Pets' cashier, who uses violet talons to remove a hair from his checked lapel.

Fine-looking animal, the love says.

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The purchase by Dingle of a dog, 9 June, represents part of a whole broad homunculoid-inspired plan. The plan unfolds ideally thus: One day next week, Myrnaloy Trask, accompanied by Nixon, leaves Collective Copy at lunchtime, as is her wont. She heads south on Great Awakening, toward the town common, where her lunch is picked and eaten while Nixon is encouraged to make complete use of the limitless facilities. As M. heads south down the broad Northampton sidewalk, Barry Dingle, down the street, theoretically emerges from a convenient vantage point and moves north on same sidewalk, holding the leash of one well-rested, libidinous, pep-talked male Setter/Retriever. As he and Myrnaloy begin to converge, Dingle contrives something clever — tripping, bumping into the odd passing spike-haired pedestrian — to render his hand plausibly absent one leash-handle. Dingle's dog, driven to erotic frenzy by its time in confinement and the proximity of a premenstrual female S/R, is on Nixon like a shot. Etc., but ideally not too much etc., because Barry Dingle suddenly flops onto the scene and extracts upright dog from hunched bitch before any uninvited indiscretions are committed.

The plan having the ideally three-fold result that: (a) Dingle is able to meet and reestablish social ties w/ Myrnaloy Trask w/o the oppressive fly-in-ointment atmosphere that attends the presence of Don Megala, who devotes his pre-prandial hours to his antique dulcimer craft; (b) Dingle appears sensitive, conscientious, possibly chivalric, in rescuing Myrnaloy's dog from drooling amorous assault right there on the main thoroughfare's sidewalk; (c) Myrnaloy sees that the sensitive, chivalric, etc., Dingle is in possession of 1 (one) male dog of just the right lineage and enthusiasm for the bulletin board's published assignment.

The above results, then, according to the projections of Dingle's homunculoid love, lead with arithmetic inevitability to the mating of the two pets, the symbolism of which vis à vis Dingle and the increasingly Megala-dissatisfied Myrnaloy Trask escapes neither party; thus to a Megala-free connection between Dingle and Myrnaloy, one based on mutual anxieties, shared dietary concerns, and the common offspring of their lives' closest companions (Dingle figures he better come up with a name pretty quick: he's acquired a catalogue for parents-to-be, and pores nightly); thus to nature taking its natural, terrifying course. Yes Dingle appropriates the heart, soul, moderate love of Myrnaloy Trask of Collective Copy. Megala is kicked in the emotional ass. A new Barry Dingle emerges from the cracked chrysalis of chastity and clotted hankie — complete, of the

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world, fulfilled, requited, ordered of heart and head, sound of mind and toe. A unified Mrynaloy/Dingle homunculus moves stately and plumply away, heading possibly north, disappearing into a cadet-blue horizon that darkens to a gloam of unity, eternity, immoderate love's good night.

So, 9 June, Dingle maneuvers his dog, rattling with Dalmane, listing ever so slightly to port or starboard at female's passage, home without major incident. The dog eats three plastic bowls of Purina, sleeps for seventy-two hours, and establishes itself in front of the television. Dingle's love bides its time.

Nighttime, 14 June 1983, Troy, New York, Mrs. Dingle lies next to Mr. Dingle and dreams the following dream:

Nighttime, 14 June 1983 B.C., Kingdom of Ithaca, the King of Ithaca, played in the dream by Nelson Eddy, has a dream. He dreams that a ship carrying a virulent plague from the Ionian Sea's south enters the port of Ithaca the following day. He dreams that, soon thereafter, plague erupts in the kingdom, and ravages it. He dreams that the plague eventually carries off his devoted Queen of a wife, played by Mrs. Dingle, and his handsome Prince of a son, played by the straight-eyed young Barry D. on whom Attic sandals had looked so darn dapper.

The King of Ithaca awakens 15 June 1983 B.C. and is so distressed by his dream that he brushes aside his Queen's advice and neglects to eat a good Mediterranean breakfast. He summons his Royal Advisor, played here by Don Megala, which is passing strange, since Mrs. Dingle has never met Don Megala. The Advisor listens to the distressed King's dream. He strokes his well-groomed beard. Like the King, like all prehistoric pagan-types, the Advisor takes dreams very seriously. He reflects. After substantial reflection, a flaming torch of inspiration appears over his head: he advises the King simply to stop, on this day, any ship approaching from the south before such ship can enter the port of Ithaca, to keep such ship far out to sea, south, downwind, and to quarantine it, in order to ensure that whatever is on this theoretical ship, plague-wise, stays out there, far far away.

Sure enough. By lunchtime, a ship, tacking chaotically, sporting an ominous obsidian sail, manned by a moaning, bubo-studded crew, appears on the southern Ionian horizon. The King sends his most

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formidable Man O' War out to halt the ship, has the ship quarantined, and then just to be on the safe side has the formidable Man O' War itself quarantined, all far far out to sea, downwind.

Sure enough. The black-sailed ship turns out to be a veritable petri dish of plague germs. The Advisor's advice to keep it out of the port looks to be sound. The King, the Queen, and the big and strong and emmetropic Prince all rejoice over a lavish supper rich in high-density lipids.

Except a few days later (represented in Mrs. Dingle's dream by the fluttering palimpsests of a Hellenistic daily planner) yes a few days later, plague erupts in the kingdom of Ithaca. It ravages even the more respectable neighborhoods of the capital city. It eventually carries off the devoted Mrs. Dingle and the binocular, fine-sandaled Barry D.

Nelson Eddy plunges into well-coiffed despair, not to mention rage. He summons Don Megala. The two men are to be seen facing each other, perfumed hankies fastened over their mouths and noses, in a linen-draped castle chamber festooned with garlands of olive leaves, roses, garlic, various herbal propitiations to big-biceped gods.

The King sketches for his Advisor his despair, rage. Thanks to the Advisor's advice, he says, the dream-foretold plague-ship was stopped, isolated, kept at a big-time distance. And yet here, in Ithaca, as the dream foretold, is some pretty goddamn clear evidence of plague. The King demands an explanation, hinting that the continued connection between the Advisor's well-bearded head and toga'd body could well depend on the force of that explanation.

There is a long silence while both Nelson Eddy and Don Megala utilize the filmy June sunlight through the windows' woven linen to present profiles, respectively agonized and pensive, to Mrs. Dingle's dreamvision. Really long silence. Then the Advisor changes expression below the tattered torch-flame of a tardy but near-epiphanic realization. He smiles a slow smile, one of sadness as at the inevitable, taking the King by the elbow and guiding him confidentially to the chamber's corner, even though no one else is around. The King, looking about, impatiently clears his throat while the Advisor feels delicately at his own.

He advises the King: it was, unfortunately, nothing other than the King's dream itself that has brought plague to Ithaca, the kingdom.

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The interval 11:50 to 11:57am EDT, 15 June 1983, finds a tiny percentage of the planet's persons involved in a tiny percentage of the planet's various and ineluctably modal situations.

8:50am PDT, Dr. W.W. Skeat, Fullerton, California, driving north on the Brea Highway toward an Osco to obtain an esoteric brand of peroxide mouthwash, finds himself, in his car, afflicted with an enormous jumping muscle in his right buttock. The muscle jumps, bouncing him around in his seat. Skeat whimpers; his car begins to weave.

11:50am EDT, Myrnaloy Trask, Collective Copy, concludes a pain-racked and I-should-have-known-flavored conversation with Don Megala, professional student, re the issue of her having entered his loft last night to find a nude Smith post-graduate (actually one Pamela Drax, 25, Ithaca, NY) astride Megala's doubly-bearded face. Megala, at his dulcimer work-table, perspiring over a little brown forest of blunt Bass bottles, claims that it had not been as it appeared. Myrnaloy responds with a shrill expanded variant of Oh sure. Megala, looking about him, launches into something about a contact lens lost under circumstances so bizarre he guesses he couldn't expect anyone to believe him about it outside an environment of very special sharing and trust. Myrnaloy laughs, cries, invects. Running his hand through the memory of his hair, Megala alludes with transparent patience to Myrnaloy's still-narratively-shadowy personal troubles regarding sexuality and men. From here things deteriorate faster than clinkers in fists. Myrnaloy hangs up and crumples onto the form-feeder of her Xerox. The form-feeder coldly continues to form-feed.

6:51am MT, Patricia Dingle of Rock Springs, Wyoming, Hypo-Arctic Correspondent for *Geo* Magazine, wakes alone in a mummy-shaped bag by a dead fire on the northern shore of Coronation Gulf, North-Northwest Territories, Canada, to discover that the fingers of her right hand have escaped the bag's faulty zipper and are frost-bitten solid. An odd windy June snow is falling, flakes skittering like mad insects over the solid crust of the shore. She looks at the dark remains of her campfire and the bright polkadots of frozen blood in her hand's cyan.

11:51am EDT, Mrs. Dingle, Troy, New York, sits over a corn toastie and peach tea and tries to articulate an unspeakable fear to Mr. Dingle, who is arranging leaders and flies on a tackle box's second tier.

11:51am EDT, Barry Dingle, Northampton, Massachusetts, *sans*

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glasses, *avec* best poncho and conic cotton slacks, lurks in the recessed doorway of the Leftward Ho Cafe, just south on Great Awakening from The Whole Thing and Collective Copy. His ominously frisky dog held tight between his knees, Dingle is awaiting the public appearance of Nixon and Trask. Courage defined glows bright along his ribs, illuminating the glazed doll's-eyes of an immoderate love, sitting lotus on Dingle's heart, staring straight ahead beneath the steady sixty-watt glow of a plan's fruition. The last of a shelf of spring rain-clouds is moving away east, carrying with it the drepanoid nub of a descending rainbow.

11:53am EDT, K.K. McFadden, Stenographer to the Assistant Press Secretary to the President of the United States, Washington, D.C., makes a stenographic error, asserting, in a pre-summit statement to be read to the Cyrillic media by Press Secretary Speakes, that the President is, as he's iterated time and again, willing to go the extra diplomatic mile to ensure that the terrible possibility of unclear war never becomes a reality.

11:54am EDT, Mrs. Dingle is at the telephone, dialing the Northampton number of The Whole Thing, her heart ridden with a nameless angst.

11:54am EDT, Myrnaloy Trask, an automaton of distress, takes her zucchini bread and mineral water and dog and exits Collective Copy, moving south into the lunchtime sidewalk crowd's spectrum of hair and Kabuki paint. She feels humidity, sees a thoroughfare's rising steam, hears the brief rustle of her sheltered board, smells ozone and the sweet diesel of the idling public bus.

6:54pm ADT, Aristotle Onassis, on his yacht, four degrees west and six north of Lord Howe Island in the Tasmanian Sea, ruminates over a celery juice at his yacht's wet bar. He sits on a teakwood barstool. The seat of the stool and the wet bar's top are covered in an exquisite cyan leather processed from the scrotums of sperm whales under Mrs. O's personal supervision. Onassis twirls his icecubes with a thick finger.

8:54am PDT, W.W. Skeat narrowly avoids contact with a Trailways bus in the Highway's left lane. He shifts on his bottom, raising the offending ham off the driver's seat. The Trailways bus falls in behind him, the driver honking at Skeat's inclined-to-port image through two layers of thick glass.

11:54am EDT, Don Megala redials Collective Copy, is informed that a very upset Ms. Trask has left for lunch. Megala peels at the triangular label of a moist bottle, staring at a half-strung instrument.

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6:55am MT, Patricia Dingle, eyes rimed with ice, palate hanging with the oystery starlight of extreme outdoor fear, makes a clumsy incision in the first finger of her frozen hand with a camp knife. The incision is a deep one just beneath the nail. She begins squeezing her finger with her left hand, moving the frozen blood up the finger and out the incision. The blood leaves the finger in a bright solid mass, protrudes in an arc into the snow-skittered and very cold air. Patricia Dingle remembers her covert passion for sweet cherry Freezer-Pops as a milk-drinking child and is suddenly unwell onto the royal gulf's sloped shore.

11:55am EDT, Barry Dingle emerges from the doorway of the Leftward Ho and moves north on the broad sidewalk toward the tiny, divergent, dual images of Myrnaloy Trask and her life's companion. The sidewalk before him, aswarm with mohawked women, weak men in leather, children in dyed smocks, branches in his sight into two vivid columns. Dingle makes for the distant root where the columns converge, where two Myrnaloy's and two incontinent dogs will come together. His sandals slap the wet pavement. Dingle tastes the material of his heart on his tongue. His white knuckles are redly dotted with clench on his dog's heavy leash; he's numb; he does not feel the dog's abortive lunges at the crewcut Sapphoids passing just outside Dingle's crossed-inward ken as they whirl on spurred boots, most of them, glaring at the male animal and either saluting as in Rome or assuming martial-arts postures. Dingle is blind to what passes; he stares straight ahead; his immoderate love's eyes roll over white beneath its lit bulb.

11:55am EDT, Mrs. Dingle exchanges terse greetings with Nigel, temporary helmsman of The Whole Thing, lunchtime. She asks for Dingle.

8:50-8:57am MT, the Eskew brothers, Ronnie and Boone, both remanded to the custody of the Arizona Department of Corrections for terms not to exceed twelve years, attach a centerfold to the back of new inmate Dean-Paul Doyle, age 18, and sodomize him repeatedly on the floor of a crowded dormitory in Cell Block D, Arizona State Correctional Facility, Florence, AZ.

11:56am EDT, Myrnaloy Trask moves south on the sidewalk, seeing little past her curtain of hot tears but a miasma of colored hair, khaki pants, the twinkle of emergent sun on single earrings. Her past and present whirl together and yield a tornado of pain. Nixon trots cheerfully beside her.

11:56am EDT, Mrs. Dingle, on the phone, finds herself weeping for

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no good reason. Nigel tries to soothe her with a recipe for gazpacho.

6:56pm EDT, Aristotle Onassis, on his barstool, on his yacht, sees on the radar dish monitor behind him the videotaped face of Cliff Robertson, speaking on behalf of AT&T, which Aristotle owns. Robertson looks tan and fit. Onassis can see both their faces' reflections in his polished mirror over his wet bar, on his yacht.

11:56am EDT, Don Megala, waiting for the special Weather-That-Wood brand shellac to dry on a soon-to-be-antique dulcimer, smokes a Dunhill, looking out his workshop window at the whitewashed New England brick wall the window faces.

8:56am MT, ten-week-old Shauna Doyle, Olney, Arizona, lies on the carpet of her absent mother's trailer. She sees the sun shine faint pink through the upright ear of the white Husky puppy standing guard over her as Barry Dingle moves forward into convergence. His white-eyed love chants prayers for the living. The teams close. Nixon, in new heat, strains at the approach of Dingle's restrained male. The clouds, a dark eastern blight on an immoderate blue sky, rumble as their commalike nubbin of rainbow hangs there, indecisive. Myrnaloy is blind. Dingle smiles wildly as he reaches the columns' union, smiling, poorly feigning a shock of recognition. He goes into a rehearsed stumble of ideal surprise — this time, though, unideally stubbing a swollen toe on the pole of the bus stop's tall sign — loosening his grip on the length of chain. Dingle's dog is uninterested in Nixon: its rolling eyes lock on a point just below the denim waistline of Myrnaloy Trask, upwind. Dingle goes all too convincingly for his hurt toe, howling, his right foot brought up and held with both white hands; the Retriever is set free, its military chain a suitor's jewelry. It clears a bright puddle in one horny bound. From below, the puddle reflects upward the not-pretty, bright-red arousal of one male dog. Myrnaloy stops. Dingle stops. Dingle's dog hangs in mid-air, entombed in color, fixed and fused in an unutterable focus.