

**Skirting the Subject: a Hearing**

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*The following is a court transcript. All names and adjectives were changed: the Court renamed Stillness; Defense and Opposition, To and Fro; the Jury is an occasional reader; our Defendant is the Witness. The Witness is accused of passages between states. [Cited precedence: Virgil and the Book of Numbers (Targum Pseudo-Jonathan: Chapter XXXV, line 17)].*

- 1 **Stillness** In *the Book of Numbers* intention is decided by material: iron is murder, by wood, murder; stone, bronze—hard materials have hard intentions. Soft materials: soft. Death by warm sand, or if a person dies in a gentle mist, *Numbers* would consider this accident. And there are cases when several materials are used, or even many. Twine, grass, leaves, mud, shells, wind, dew, sand, copper, iron, stone, water, fog. When fog is used, the intention is foggy—same with dust, dusty. Water is split: warm, as in a warm goodbye or cold as in cold-blooded murder; in mist the verdict concerning water is divided. One stream swells, many thin, the intentions divide overall drawn into constellations from dust and completely unbuilt to hold the great silence of secrets between them all still.  
Which material did what mixed with the heavy silence that hovers between them all very still.  
Stillness is gravity's decision. Always even: all rise in motion Fro.
  
- 2 **Fro** Movement is a pendulum falling for stillness. Course reflected in recourse, beginning in end. We proceed toward a sentence by our passages to and fro but in passages between states the same laws won't apply. Our final sentence exceeds beyond the end in mind.  
As the borders of mind are marked by language, we cross the borders letting go and letting language decide. Swinging now toward yesterday, by the lesser weight of its dictionary we look to Latin: with a much smaller vocabulary, Latin is a smooth language whittled like a rudder from wood, it softly guides each sentence to a point. Passing an English sentence through the borders of Latin, four words converge into one word. English is ushered through corridors by a sleeping gondolier in a gentle current of merging paths. Dear reader, never lost in this direction, may you drop all things, fall toward stillness unburdened with no end in mind, may you drift downstream toward Pangaea, the beginning of time where all materials and all things meet in a single dot.  

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- 3 **To** I apologize Fro, for I've missed your point. If our passage is a pendulum, notice it swinging now fore from Latin into English and how Latin with four times fewer words, will cross the borders greeted by three or four possible paths. If a translator discerns one passage, a word is followed by another word, and this word too will divide into more possibilities and more choices and each of these divides until thoughts breed in every syllable.  
Now with the pendulum at its height and slowing with a ripeness for drift, watch as a traveler floats past the point of certainty and continues

drifting until, awakened by the shores of Aramaic and Ancient Greek, the dictionary swells and each word divides again with new possibility.

Not able to read the characters, a sentence holds nearly nothing for a traveler. The traveler sees everything. Sees the character of veins on leaves and by clouds, sees it will rain. Opiates are stripped of Latin titles. Sand is emptied of time in the daily exchange of salt between the islands; a man is carrying water in his hands from a freshwater spring toward the ocean shedding droplets, now rushing back to the spring then forth to the ocean. The island is a sub-topical paradise, though topics do drift through qualities of green and in darker shades too where a translator meets a traveler absorbed by the silence of vision.

Stillness is gravity's decision and if decision is still, let thought be silent. Silent is the law of sight.

*The Witness takes oath and reads a story:*

4 **Witness**

*The Weasel's Way Out*

*The Weasel finds itself in a hole. This is not a metaphor, lots of animals live in holes, rabbits; hedgehogs; gophers; snakes, so too the weasel finds itself in a hole. He easily dug himself into this hole but there are limits to how far down one can go. Geologists know about that. Now here is a metaphor: You find yourself in a room. It's a small room and you can't heat the small room; you can't find money to rent the small room. Your clothes come from the trashcan of a startup millionaire named Alex. You owe money to an insurance company. In two weeks, an immigration office will ask you to leave and you'll ask 'where?' and they'll tell you to leave the office. Perhaps this is what 'a hole' means, but enough metaphors—the weasel has hit rock, and we were discussing the weasel's way out. So let's get back to ending the story. How will it end? Faced with a similar problem, that clever Jack Kerouac went on and on and on and ripped off the bottom of the page, and that's one way. The weasel digging himself deeper, ripping at the earth with those bare hands. My god he worked so much, went so low, so deep until he came upon something. Something very hard. And he stayed there forever polishing the surface of a dirty old metaphor.*

5 **Fro**

Q: I gather the Witness is a traveler?

A: Yes, I suppose.

Q: And where are you going?

A: Actually I...

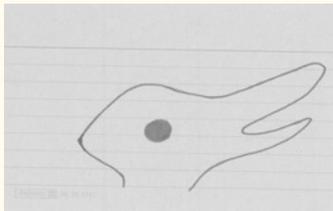
Q: Do you have an end in mind?

A: No, I try not to.

Q: Your Stillness, the traveler begins without end. There is no end without beginning and without end, a traveler makes a false start toward a faux finish. What the traveler sees is a scratch on the mirror.

Postcards, and souvenirs, trinkets in time, dried eucalyptus, pewter beads. A shell holds the ocean; a fig holds the moon over Serifos. And by the silk and deer of Nara a traveler empties her pockets at the gates. Passing between states, souvenirs once full are emptied. Things once overflowing are sucked dry by moon and tide.

- 6 **To** Thank you Fro. The Witness took oath on a holy diagram and I would like to consider its meaning:



On one hand there's a rabbit. On the other a duck. A jury chooses one of two sides. A translator finds one passage between two. As the Witness is a traveler and as traveling is not a path, we'll call it a "way." Not really a "way" either, we'll call it a "method." And still not really a "method" we'll use the word "mode." *Mode*, in German, French, Dutch; *moda* in Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, Greek; *muduh* in Arabic: the word refers to dress and also to the Latin *modo*, meaning 'just now.' The traveler sees and this is their mode.

The visible world, silent as stone, is hard and clear, or soft as in mist, the world is misty and divided. The qualities of sight are so infinite, it's difficult to imagine an image, without imagining an image *of* something.

Ends are gathered from the beginning Fro, but a Weasel has no end in mind. At rest between states, the Witness took no passage. Your Stillness, do you see what the rabbit and duck are wearing? If the rabbit wore blue what about the duck? And what about turquoise? Black Vellore and velvet? The Weasel's diagram reveals: 1. Seeing a sign is prior to taking a path and 2. Looking is prior to reading.

Just as Latin is not faithful to English, the coming second will not reflect the last and I ask for a sentence to reflect a pendulum's non-passage. Something visible. I ask the Jury what the rabbit and duck should wear.

- 7 **Fro** I'd like to call on my secondary witness, the Record.
- 8 **Stillness** The court stenographer will have to take leave from transcription.

*Eventually the Record returns to stenography.*

- 9 **Stillness** After a short recess Fro will make sense of invisible testimony.

*30-minute Recess.*

- 10 **Fro** Your Stillness, sometimes a sentence isn't visible and it will present itself over time. I remind you of the translator's parable:  
 "There was once a man who tried to hold his sentence by cupping his hands together and carrying water from a small stream to a big river. There was quite a distance between the stream and river, and each trip the Translator shed many droplets arriving at the big river with nothing left, dripping as his sentence was. Many people found the Translator's attempt to hold his sentence disgraceful. But the Translator went to and fro without doubt until his passage became so trodden and worn and so wet by his dripping droplets that a small brook began to trickle toward the big river—"
- 11 **To** Yes: "he sits down and, as the streams rejoice as one, the Translator (still unable to hold his sentence) now fully beholds the brook as it reflects the sky and a small sparrow. He beholds how a tiny stream can even hold the moon—"
- 12 **Fro** And what about the dew on leaves and the smell of rain on streets in summer. And water rising between a warm and cold wind or from wet earth when fog is held by heat and the heart, mostly of water, rises too until you feel it in your throat where the thick part of your tongue meets the top of your spine—

- 13 **To** Fro, we agree that a person can't hold their own sentence. But it isn't slipping through fingers, it's dripping from the vowels:  
 Before Phoenician alphabet when Sumerians made pictures, these pictures couldn't be spoken. Just as today, pictures are spoken *of* and spoken *about*. Pictures are silent, silent and still and as secret as stone; as silent as scars. Cuneiform was scratched into clay and, also silent, these early scars for putting thoughts in order became mathematical notation. And still they were completely unspeakable— only spoken of, spoken *about* but never actually spoken.  
 The characters had names. Aleph, Beth, Gimel, but they didn't have a voice.

$$(+ \pi \int \mu)$$

Today you can find curves in your mouth and make them into sounds:

O E I U A

Written words today unite mathematical and musical notation. It was not always this way, not before the vowels. The vowels were made to hold sound, so songs could be stilled. These new characters allowed math to vibrate on skin. What is the metric of music? Where does sound resonate? Suddenly numbers could touch your body. Sound flowed in and out and in Greece dead voices were given breath as if dreams were escaping from sleep. It was not only math that was leaking but a place without space and without time. Heaven was leaking and death too. The voices of regular people climbed into eternity showing up between states in paradise and alphabet. Sound didn't cease. The gods called a plumber. He came to the gates, and said "the death of sound is here to rid your taps of dripping." But he was a regular plumber and a few of the old gods snuck out, ending up on the streets.

- 14 **Fro** Your Stillness, this is a characterization of eternity.
- 15 **Stillness** Sustained. Is there anything else?
- 16 **Fro** Yes, I'd like to ask the Weasel, what happened after you left the office?
- 17 **Witness** I went to a waiting room and after a long while of waiting, I was moved to another. Then moved through many rooms before arriving in quite a nice room with very fine curtains. I was told that in order to stay in this room I would need an application but I didn't see any so I took out a piece of paper and wrote on the top: *Application*. Once I wrote *Application* I immediately felt I was sinking. I erased the word *Application* and wrote *Occupation*, then I tried to name exactly what I was doing. *Sitting* wasn't right so I tried *Waiting*. I erased that and wrote *Writing* but to write what I was doing only when I was writing was ridiculous. So I erased that and tried *Waiting* again, then *Thinking*, which was pretentious and I erased it right away. I tried so many times to figure it out, that my paper became a murky gray and I was quickly moved from room to room again and again until the rooms and the *waiting, sitting, writing, waiting, thinking* became very familiar. Then I ended up in a very small room, like a closet with four small doors and I went through one marked *Î*. I passed through a dark corridor and I ended up on the street for a bit with some other characters, I can't really remember their names.
- 18 **Fro** Nothing further.
- 19 **Stillness** When did you first notice you were a weasel?
- 20 **Witness** Well, it's nice to write in motels and I remember driving to Winnipeg once staying at a place called Shady Sleep Motel at 3pm after driving all night—me and Mitchell and Sophia. Beautiful Sophia, she asked for a room and the clerk asked for how long. We decided we'd only need about three hours so we got an hourly rate.  
I couldn't sleep so I spent the afternoon writing, watching trucks go by. Five years later Sophia and I cleaned rooms in Berlin for awhile. You'd see the things of so many people, fantasy was the best part. I found notes sometimes and always wished they'd be more specific like the long auburn hair a woman left in a bathtub or the dark lipstick on a pillowcase. I have to say, in no case were words more interesting than a stain on the sheets or a smudge on the mirror.

*Motions rest.*

- 21 **Stillness** We will now take recess while the Jury settles on a sentence.

*30-minute Recess.*

22 **Jury** Asked to look rather than read, the Jury agrees cuneiform looks like the layered prints of birds moving across mud. An eager mud sucks at the ankles and in protest against sinking the birds move quickly with a very good feeling about where they want to go. This very good feeling, thirst or hunger comes without specific directions.

Whether language leads a sentence to or fro, the purpose of sentence is to avoid sinking. And since decision is still and stillness is prone to sinking, it's very lucky that sinking holds a trace. It's trace that holds the quivering thing and shelters it quietly in stillness. With this in mind, the intentions of mud are both gentle and soft and likewise, if decisions can hold a trace, then decisions must also be very soft and gentle things.

The birds are sentenced to flight as it is with vowels, to defy gravity and stillness; to obscure provenance, as it is with figs; to give voice to paradise, as it is with sounds. The birds pass between states—they are fed by what they find between shells.

23 **Sentence** Proof of stillness waits in sound. In hearing waits the sea. Beneath the topics flows a spring through copper pipes and beads. Still for proof of plumbing we await a foreign sentence but look how waiting spring has been to ripen with the tenses. From all the dark that sleep is in between the states at rest, a stillness waits in waiting rooms filing for redress.

Notes:

[line 1] *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan: Numbers*, trans. with notes by Ernest G. Clarke (Collegeville, MN, 1995). Note: Other Aramaic translations of Pseudo-Jonathan don't describe this decision of intent through materials.

[line 2] In Frederick Ahl's introductory notes on his translation of Virgil's *Aeneid* (Oxford, 2007), he describes how Greek verse transforms theologically as it moves into English grammar.

[line 4] Jack Kerouac blamed the cocker spaniel Blotchy for ripping off the bottom of his page.

[line 6] Refers to the *Bardo*, "the in-between"; L. Wittgenstein's rabbit/duck; and writings on the fourth *skandha*: concepts.

[line 13] Friedrich Kittler, *Mathematik und Musik Band 1: Hellas; Teil 1: Aphrodite* (Paderborn, 2006).

