

Susan Howe

FROM "FRAME STRUCTURES"

I knew the story of Fanny Appleton Longfellow's death by fire, on the 4th of July, 1861, because of a little blue parasol in my American grandfather's apartment. She had taken it along to shade her face from the sun when she went out to Quincy earlier the same summer to visit my great-grandparents. They kept her sunshade as a memento. Eventually it came to my grandmother Fanny Quincy, maybe because of her name. When she died young, Grandpa took it with him to Louisburg Square. Mary Elizabeth Manning Howe Adams passed along Francis Elizabeth Appleton Longfellow's faded and tattered sunshade to the National Park Service in 1995. The Park Service manages the Longfellow House now it is a museum.

Independence Day. She is sitting near an open window in the family library. There is a meadow just outside where her children often play. It's midsummer they are probably around somewhere. She has cut small locks of hair from her two younger daughters is using sealing wax to close these souvenirs of love in boxes. Two doctrines materialism and spiritualism. The objects which surround my body those which are near to my body frame a simple idea of time. As shadows wait on the sun so a shot soul falling shot leaves its body fathomless to draw it out. The armies are tired of their terrible mismanagement not counting the missing. Envelopes and boxes are often metaphorically linked with motherly contrivance. Domesticity is in her hands so of course these are arranged; picked for her children's children to touch and be touched. Quickly quickly it has all been too easy. Wisdom is a defense and money is a defense. Knowledge knowledge to the last grain of

economic innocence. Will you come back so far to show us the cost? You ask if the universe only exists in thought, creative and subtle? Flame is not impalpable. She is using a lighted match to melt the wax has already begun to recover the refuse. Don't you remember the essence of English idealism? The wax is here just so things *are*.

A spark from a match maybe hot wax ignites her flowing muslin summer dress. Her husband, sleeping in his study nearby, his custom always, hears short phrases not words. Compare the phenomenon of sleeping with the phenomenon of burning. I suppose him a great distance off in pastures detached from memory. Enveloped in flame she runs into vision a succession of static images a single unbroken movement under her breath "dead woman" she bats at wing strokes. Arcadia Accadia L'Acadie sea birds clang. Why can't he see that the loved object will perish? Well we don't see dark spaces between film frames, why, because of persistence of vision. God's sun-clothed bride wades backward white petticoat tabernacle body as in a dream I perceive distance a great way off. She grips him. Print your symptoms of melancholia on a sheet of paper in a singsong manner now get better. He tries. Tries to smother the flames by wrapping her in any near cloth object such as a mat or rug. Fire badly burns his face and hands but he would rather be burned than buried. Long ago open fireplaces invited guests to enjoy the warmth of huge wood fires; candles and primitive lamps provided some escape from the immediacy of lived experience. Stricken out of the cloud-folds of her garment shaken she suffers intensely for a short time then gets put to sleep with ether so she wakes up calm and free of pain. Edenic mapping of the New World Acadie. Softly softly hear the noise of distant falls of many wars and wars for national independence.