

To Write of Repeated Patterns · *Albert Goldbarth*

THEY SAY HE'S 16. They say in the dead of the night — they really *do* say this, “the dead of the night” — he sneaks to the attic, planned or unplanned nobody yet knows, he lifts his daddy’s “squirrel gun” from its case, then sneaks back down with it, carefully opens the door to the room in which they’re sleeping, and blasts them out of this life, one shot to the temple each, in quick succession. The neighbors are interviewed, “. . . shocked” “. . . a *wonderful* boy” “. . . he *loved* his parents.” Then the camera brings him into its painfully clear-edged imagery. He’s seated behind a desk at headquarters, confused by himself, by everything and everyone. He doesn’t look over 12, a limp rag doll of a child, being questioned for parricide.

Skyler and I are at Sarah’s and Eric’s. “Change the channel!” What we’d wanted was mild diversion floating in over our afternoon beers. There’s TV snow and lightningbolts; then, a couple of numbers up or down the dial, the news is into its loonier wrap-up phase: “There was three of them, three feet high. They was green.” A trucker spotted them trotting down a playground-slideish gangplank “from a silver ship. It looked like, you know . . .” “. . . A shark’s fin fitted with lateral wings,” the one other observer, a priest, chimes in. A *priest*? “They peered around, returned to the ship, and took off. That’s all. I think they were trying to bring us a *message*.”

Tonight, while Skyler’s asnooze, I’m up with a book. It says, in the voice of classical lamentation, “A man looks on his own son as his enemy. The heart is aggressive, blood is everywhere, no office functions properly. The rich wake poor, the poor wake rich, the land whirls around like a potter’s wheel.” Verily. The television yeasayeth this with every snoopy camcorder shot of a Presidential rally or a weekend convention of skateboard and dirtbike enthusiasts. Some group of PTA sex education fanatics, costumed *à la* birds and bees. Some show of support for a local pastor in jail on charges of fondling a 10-year-old girl. The remains of an airliner: yes, a three member suicide squadron smuggled a plastic gun on board in six unrecognizable segments. “Everywhere men are killed wrongfully.”

This text, however, is from the Egyptian Old Kingdom — 2500 B.C. Some nights — this isn’t the first time I’ve consulted it after overmuch media brouhaha — its cannily contempo applicability leaves me shaking my

head in a bleary wonder, blinking my eyes not so much at a world gone mad (which would, at least, be an adventure) but a world that's always been, and is continually, mad.

I may as well also admit that Skyler and I have squabbled. I'm downstairs reading inside an invisible bubble of self-righteousness. She's upstairs in bed, and emanating waves of anger out of her body, regular convection currents the instruments would pick up as scarlets and indigos. We'll make up soon — tomorrow, most likely. We'll add our latest display of this commonest syndrome to its history. We've done it before, the billions before us have done it before, the tiffing couples on pleasure barges beached along the Nile have had their ritual version of skirmish-and-smooch, and some nights when I finally tamp myself under the sheets beside her, I see we're two strokes of an all-over pattern repeated — past where sight thins out — across the fabric of being human, or being alive at all.

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If I'm going to write of repeated patterns, let me mention the relatively well-known mid-12th century report of William of Newburgh, about “an unheard-of prodigy, which took place during the reign of King Stephen.” Incredible though its details are, he “was so overwhelmed by the weight of so many and such competent witnesses” that he feels, finally, “no regret at having recorded an event so miraculous.”

By a village of East Anglia, at harvest time, two children emerged from “some very ancient cavities” near the fields, where the reapers found them wandering in a daze — “a boy and a girl, completely green in their persons, and clad in garments of a strange colour, and unknown materials.”

They couldn't speak English; for months they ate only raw beans from the pod, “until they learned the use of bread. At length, by degrees, they changed their original colour, through the natural effect of our food, and became like ourselves.” (*reader, let a bell go off*)

Then they told a story of having been whisked here from “the land of St. Martin” where the sun doesn't rise, and all is perpetual twilight, but the countryfolk are Christian. They were tending their father's flocks when they both “heard a great sound . . . we became on a sudden entranced, and found ourselves among you in the fields.”

The boy died not long after. His sister “continued in good health” and “was married at Lynne, and was living a few years since.”

This isn’t the earliest sighting of green otherpeople by any means, but something in its narrative and phrasing gives it the first truly modern *cachet*. It’s tempting to think of it as the patriarch-story (siblingarch-story, really) from which an anecdotal family of wunderkind and aliens descend, yet it’s more properly just one very fine retelling in a line of tellings immeasurably long.

Eight hundred years away from William of Newburgh, I pick up one of those supermarket tabloids devoted to cheap astonishment. June 12, 1990: **MOM ON VEGGIE DIET GIVES BIRTH TO GREEN BABY.** “‘Even the whites of his eyes are pale green,’ notes stunned Dr. Dominic Valenso.” He’s the cover story, staring out at me cute and gooing. He’s printed in no inconclusive hint of light lime, but a deep and even St.-Paddy’s-Day-green inked freely from a tube that’s labeled *Shamrock*. “‘It’ll take some time, but with a well-balanced diet the baby should lose the green color eventually,’ Dr. Valenso promises.” (*reader, does this ring a bell?*) Meanwhile, “teary-eyed mom Consuela Alvarez” wrings her lovely cocoa-colored caucasian hands.

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I’ve zeroed it down to that handful of seconds of TV sputter while Sarah was switching channels. Before that, everything was copacetic. Right after, Skyler started with those only-Albert-can-recognize-them petulant glances that — well, but she’d have another version. I brought up subject x or y; I cranked on into my supercilious mode, with that look I beam out by tilting my head down and glaring *over* the rims of my glasses . . .

The truth is, neither one of us has a clue as to why we’ve suddenly lowered the interpersonal temperature of our house to that of a meat-locker. There’s no issue being battled. Ideas of right and wrong aren’t at stake. We only know we brought a sliver of coolness home from Sarah’s and Eric’s, and managed to fan the thing — a snideness here, a willful mis-interpretation there — into a berg.

This “isn’t like us.” We’re normally sweet in our love, and sane. In a truce of a few talky minutes’ duration before bed, Skyler says, “I think

we've been taken over by outerspace beings. I can feel it. They're growing some gunk in our heads. Seeds." She's really *into* it now. "If our heads were sliced open they'd look like cantaloupes: all those alien seeds in the center."

So that's when it happened, I'm theorizing: the TV fizz was an interdimensional portal, through which the little green creatures from Planet Unimaginable grabbed hold of our unwary minds. That way, the two of us aren't at fault. That way, external agency as large as science fiction bears the blame.

And I mean it, too, if by the formulation "little green creatures" I get to mean our reptilian selves, that were there in the primal underdrift of our brains before our brains were even undifferentiated plasm laboring toward shape—our gilled and serpent-tailed lizard selves, our circulating of cold blood through the rockbottom saurian folds.

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What I'd like to do now is remind you of some 14th-century narrative goings-on. The scene is Christmastide at Camelot, and at the Round Table *with all the meat and the mirth that men could devise* are Arthur, *the comeliest king*, and his courtly followers, *the most noble knights known under Christ, and the loveliest ladies that lived on earth ever*. All is ceremonially festive. Their initial course is served, to the accompaniment of trumpets, drums and *noble pipes*, and all of the world seems good and in order to these good, orderly personages, but — *scarce were the sweet strains still in the hall* when *there hurtles in at the hall-door an unknown rider*. Larry D. Benson says, "the action is suddenly suspended, and over ninety lines are devoted to a carefully detailed portrait."

Put simply, the man is *oureal enker grene*, entirely green. His lavish beard is green. His *raiment noble* is green; the ermine mantle, the hood, the hose, the spurs, the belt and its bosses, the saddle — *all his vestiture verily (is) verdant green* and he rides *a green horse great and thick*. A tang of wildness radiates like green aurora borealis, emerald, celadon, flickering poplar. Something hugely out of the ordinary is glowering over the roast.

There hurtles in at the hall-door. . . In the still of this civilized gathering, it must be as if an interdimensional portal — *zzzt!* — has opened wide.

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By its own Middle English audience, the aspect of the Green Knight in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* — or the facets of his aspect — would have been easily read. A literary figure himself, he incorporates stock folk art figures that trail back, by ballad and creaking tavern sign, to some preliterate origin lost in green fog.

The “green man” is a “wild man” — Benson says “in folk ritual they are interchangeable.” Here, at the court of Arthur, the clues are clanked onstage: the intruder is rude in speech and in action, he brandishes an axe, his look is savage and it culminates in that formidable beard, as *big as a bush on his breast*, the poet says, referring us to the color again. And Benson: “In medieval art the wild man often wears both hair and leaves.” He is stern, perhaps hostile, and “the enemy of the knight and the opponent of the values represented by the romance courts.”

At the same time, the figure in green is Youth (I was a freshman, green at the game myself, when I first encountered the poem) and, not surprisingly, Nature in benign guise. In *The Parlement of the Thre Ages*, Youth is *gerede alle in grene*. “One finds the same green-clad figure throughout fourteenth-century literature” — vital, sweet to look upon, laughing musically into the breeze — and, by uncomplicated association, the figure comes to be symbolic of love, of springtime foliage, finally of Life itself. In the 14th-century work *Le Songe vert*, the narrator contemplates suicide, swoons, but then is revived by Venus and her attendants, and clothed by them *entire de vert*. In *Death and Life*, the latter figure is *comlye clad in kirtle and mantle of goodliest greene that euer groome ware*.

If you subscribe to a full year of a supermarket tabloid, it’s those same opposing twins you’ll meet in alternate issues, repeatedly: the evil aliens bent on enslavement, nabbing up late-night drivers from behind the wheel, strapping them onto the tables of weirdly wired Martian-scientific surgery; and the aliens of light, of peace (I think of the dove descending with the green sprig in its beak), they bring advice, and hope, they bear the shoots of other, older worlds, by which a new green Eden will blossom for us in our soil and in our hearts.

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We can follow these figures through time along unbroken vines, the figures themselves now tuber-like, below our daily notice, and now bunched up in splashy clumps.

It seems unquestionable that the wild man, the representor of everything feral lurking inside green shadow (or: in am/bush), is a presence of unfathomably ancient creation. Cain, the farmer and fratricide, is his ancestor. So is Enkidu the beast-man, foe at first and then the blood-brother of King Gilgamesh: we see him on cylinder-seals battling lions no more lushly maned than he is, and often this battle is formulaically rendered to look more like the ballroom whorl of happy partners. How far back does he go, this figure? How far back do our psyches extend?

As a character with a number of type associations, the wild man “survived among the peasantry of continental Europe well into the nineteenth century” (Benson), and a study titled *Homo Sapiens Ferus* (1988) reports “A girl of nine or ten years entered the village of Songy at dusk. Her feet were naked, her body was covered with rags and skins of animals. She wore a piece of bottle-gourd on her head. She carried a club in her hand, and when someone in the village set a dog at her she gave it such a heavy blow on the head that the animal fell over dead at her feet.” The threatening pod people lurching amok in s-f movies are cousins to her, the scaly and often antenna’ed creatures that stalk the streets of our fairest cities, the green blob/slime that carries whole groups of supporting actors and extras out of party scenes in its oozy amoeboid grip.

Likewise, the life-bestowing vegetable god precedes the Green Knight by millennia, but the two are in alliance, leafy link by link. Tammuz, consort of Ishtar and annual bringer of renewal to the Babylonian fields. Osiris, who fertilized Egypt by using his own dismembered body for seeds, who therefore tends to reviving the dead amidst the Sacred Lotus Fields of Eternity. Their largesse, over time, becomes the wealth that’s redistributed by a green-outfitted Robin Hood, quartered in his arboreal hold—or Tarzan of the Apes, in whom the law of fang and claw becomes transmuted to the vehicle of our rescue: out of the heavens, out of the thickly bough-canopied heavens, on his magic liana, he’ll arc low, lofting us up from our direst moment.

The same green-chapleted face that peers down from the corbeled arch of a 13th-century chapel smiles winningly when pushing canned peas and

green beans in The Valley of the Jolly (HO-HO-HO) Green Giant (who would later, with the growing kiddie audience in mind, be awarded the youthful sidekick Sprout). It isn't much of a secret that Jung washes clean for us, out of the murk of the ages: "Green is the color of the Holy Ghost, of life, procreation and resurrection."

Frazer, in *The Golden Bough*, details numerous "leaf-clad May Day mummers"—the Leaf King, the Grass King, Jack-in-the-Green. . . . Ronald Johnson quotes Lewis Spence: "I have seen him at South Queensferry . . . where he is known as the 'Burry Man,' a boy on whose clothes large numbers of burrs or seed-cases have been so closely sewn that he presents the appearance of a moving mass of vegetation."

In Kenneth Koch's kookily feisty poem "Fresh Air," the stifled spirit of 1950s American poetry—all too hangdog and dyspeptic—is saved from its enemies in the halls of publishing houses and universities, by a breath of sexual fervor, intuitive consciousness, and unchained craziness, blowing in over the green of the ocean: "O green, beneath which all of them shall drown!"

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Nobody knows what to think. No, make that: *everybody* knows what to think. It simply isn't the same thought.

In the days that follow his being booked on murder charges, Vonnie Coleman, 16, is become a *cause célèbre*, and certain do-good groups are organized in his defense. He's young, his face has a ruggedly puppydog power that attracts, and encourages kindness. There are rumors that the father was in debt to local hoods, and Vonnie became the easy fall guy. His various versions of that night conflict. His so-called confession was hammered together, after all, from the splinters of trauma. Anyway, if he *did* pull the trigger, the rumors say that his parents abused him and photographed it. What about the legal rights of underage suspects? Much media flap.

It doesn't help, however, that his fingerprints are coating the gun. Killing one's parents in sleep takes on a grisliness unnatural even in houses long accommodated to TV reportage of running blood. If the average result of the average roving reporter is to be believed, our average Joe-and-Jane-in-

the-street would like to see Vonnie Coleman brought to trial as an adult, and have him sentenced to being eaten alive by rats, an inch or two a day, until only the flesh of his head is with us, begging mercy, and then the rats start at his mouth.

But for my friends and myself, the tragedy and its grievous components are part of a picture so large, we can't look at Vonnie Coleman except through a historyscope or mythologyscope—and, caught in this focus, he takes his place in a sad continuum sized to the cosmos we live in. He dips sharply out of our consciousness for a couple of hours, then sneakily stitches back in. A day is made of its zillion-and-umpteenth stitches, joyous, tormenting, whatever; in the immediate moment, any one of them, half-a-brainwave long, can knock our breath into orbit and drop us to our knees. They're like the stones comprising those "Nazca lines" in Peru—you need to see them from an airplane's height, and *then* there's a chameleon or monkey or star, a meaningful pattern.

At PANDORA'S BOX! EXOTIC DANCERS! I buy a lady called Angel a drink when her set is over. Onstage, she threw sexual heat like an opened furnace. Now, she nearly cowers inside the minimal spandex bands of some chartreuse excuse-of-a-costume. She says, "His face is so innocent. I know he didn't do it! And if he did, then we should give him money, you know, government money, and let him start a new life in a different country, don't you think?" I think we should have five minutes of the innocently flirtatious discussion I'd guessed her overpriced drink would buy. But she's heard all the stories, including mine. I know: there are only so many stories.

Later, on my way out, a guy says, "Start by chopping off the sonofabitch's trigger finger. Then his gun hand. Then the arm. I'd like to make my own kid watch that, so he'd learn."

Outside—a patron's left his car lights on, who knows how long? It reminds me, somehow, of Vonnie's face as the cameras always deliver it: his eyes wide open, the rest of him blank, and beams of useless energy I can't understand are burning out into the void.

We've seen this face before: this isn't our first broadcasted pathos. This is Vonnie's face, is Vonnie Coleman's specific face, who could be you or me but for genetic dice in Chance's hands. Yet we can see that this face is cut from a template: the face has preceded the boy, the face will remain when he's only a thimble of elements spilled out, recombining.

Confusion can be useful.

For instance: the casserole of opposite meanings attached to the Green Knight, Benson finds an intentional “ambiguity (that is) part of the Green Knight’s essential character.” Merry, then scowling; intruder and, later, host; unappeasable fiend but, in a snap, indulgent friend — “the poet,” says Benson, “capitalizes on this ambiguity . . . taking care that his audience remains unsure of whether the green implies good or evil until the very end of the romance.”

And what these seemingly conflicting meanings have, at bottom, in common is the Green Knight’s utter otherness. As Benson claims, “he comes from another world altogether.” Saviour or nemesis; citizen of our own psychological shadows or sudden visitor from some “actual” but undiscovered kingdom; nature in all of its howling fury or nature in all of its mysterious verdant nurturing . . . the green is an economy for stating all of these and more, at once—because, no matter the immediate nuance, above all else the Green Knight “always represents a mode of life completely opposed to that represented by (Gawain).”

You betcha. That humongoid presence equestrienned there in the light of the sconces, his skin the color of spinach leaves. Whatever we are, he’s else.

In Henry Reed’s lyrical novel *The Green Child*, published in 1935, the title character is in many ways a different creature wholly from that figure hulking enormously into Camelot 800 years before: a slim defenseless girl, a foundling, she grows up into a slim defenseless woman, with “the same ageless innocent features” informing her countenance now, as in her childhood. Wraithlike. Fey.

Distinctions notwithstanding, though, her lineage is the green warrior’s. Her “skin was not white, but a faint green shade, the colour of a duck’s egg. It was, moreover, an unusually transparent tegument, and through its pallor the branches spread, not blue and scarlet, but vivid green” And what this betokens, obviously, is someone from an Earth that’s not *our* Earth — from “a mode of life completely opposed,” as Benson puts it. Reed: “The psychology of the Green Child was a different matter; in a sense, it did not exist.”

I say: in a sense it's always existed, parallel to our own, and it will clatter through the castle's staunch portcullis when we least expect.

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Green can't be more "other" than as elvin-green, the leafy and briery hiding-places of troll and of gnome, often their skin color too (think quick of the witch in *The Wizard of Oz*); when the Green Knight first bursts into Arthur's stronghold, *phantom and faerie the folk there deemed* that startling being.

We're talking pointed ears and impossible laws of physics, we're talking magic rings and chariots drawn by caparisoned mice. In a way, then, the alliance of "green otherness" with fairy lore is its consummate expression.

Or: its consummate expression at a given moment. We live in another moment. This is what Michell and Rickard say: "The little people who, by unanimous report, played an intrusive part in daily life up to the Middle Ages, had long been dwindling from their accustomed haunts when suddenly they reappeared, airborne and technologized and up to all their same old tricks. We refer of course to the 'UFO people.' We take this connection seriously. For modern accounts of fairies and the like we must turn to such books as *Flying Saucer Occupants* and *The Unidentified*, where a common phenomenal source for both the fairy and the UFO legend is emphasized."

It's not much more than a matter of adding "atomic propulsion" or "hyper-drive" or "star thrust" into the fairies' forges. Ronald Johnson, describing one more variant of the traditional May Day "green man" figure: "In former times he was also marched in the London Lord Mayor Day's Parade enclosed in a wooden framework on which leaves were clustered and from which came explosions of fireworks." (Picture it landing.) "Chimney sweeps paraded beneath the same pyramidal frameworks on May Day until the nineteenth century. One imagines them coming like small boxwood topiary, crackling and sparkling through the streets."

(Imagine the "sparkling" stopping, the engine turned off. Imagine them removing their helmets. They venture from the craft. They're saying—what are they saying?—can you make it out?—"Take me to your . . ."—then garble.)

And *their* world, what it's like? — we'll never know. We only have *our* language for it, and that's by definition insufficient. I can give you Dorothy's first view of The Emerald City, however: "The window panes were of green glass; even the sky above the City had a green tint, and the rays of the sun were green. There were many people, men, women and children, walking about, and these were all dressed in green clothes and had greenish skins. At one place a man was selling green lemonade, and when the children bought it Dorothy could see that they paid for it with green pennies."

Here, *she's* the alien. She's come in her frightening flying machine (a standard Kansas farmhouse). " 'What do you wish here in the Emerald City?' 'We came here to see the Great Oz,' said Dorothy." She wants to meet their leader.

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Reed's *The Green Child* takes its inspiration from a version of the same folk tale William of Newburgh reports — the brother and sister stumbling dazed from the pits, their eating of the beans, the girl's eventual adventures among humankind (in Reed's chosen version, she marries a knight "and was rather loose and wanton in her conduct"). From this green seed his novel flourishes, the children now found wandering in the year 1830, the girl become a water nymph — a naiad — instead of a forest figure: at story's end, she and its human hero sink together "hand in hand . . . below the surface of the pool," those watery recesses being as "other" a realm as the warrens below a fairy knoll.

I first read William of Newburgh's account in John Carey's smart anthology *Eyewitness to History*: 700 pages of first-hand reportage that go from plague in ancient Athens, to the fleeing of President Marcos from the Philippines in 1982. In his introduction, Carey makes the savvy, persuasive case that we can "view reportage as the natural successor to religion."

He reminds us of the constant all-pervadingness of "the media" in our lives; then: "if we ask what took the place of reportage in the ages before it was made available to its millions of consumers, the likeliest answer seems to be religion. Not, of course, that we should assume pre-communication-age man was deeply religious, in the main. There is plenty of evidence to suggest he was not. But religion was the permanent backdrop to his exist-

ence” — and, as reportage currently “supplies modern man with a constant and reassuring sense of events going on beyond his immediate horizon” and with “a release from his trivial routines, and a habitual daily illusion of communication with a reality greater than himself,” it’s easy to see (among many other revealed connections) our tabloidbabble servicing us the way the wonderworking tales of charlatan relic-peddlers must have, once.

If we admit the fairy denizens — the green-girdled, pipes-tootling, impishly tricks-playing Pucks and Pans of the whispered tales — are truly the residua of ancient gods, diminished but refusing to be hooked totally off the psychic stage . . . then we can see our saucer-men, yes and Consuela Alvarez’s celery-dermis boy-child, as the permutations of raw needs and faint glimmerings of understandings that cycle with steadfast fixity through the surface burble-and-flux of human history.

Skyler and I have “made up” — tonight there’s the ritual smooching. All of the details some aspiring short-story-writer might observe and scribble into an entry-book — the gooey pet names, the shared reserve of reference-cues that trigger giggling, the hundred ninknak specifics through the room — are ours, are ours alone, and we’ve toiled long in their compilation. But who would deny the case that our love, as much as our sorrows, reenacts the patterns we’re part of, inevitably, from cloverleaves and infinity-signs of submolecular needlepoint, to red-shift, supergalaxy, Big Bang universe swoosh? A flush. A fondle.

Jung relates our deities with our bug-eyed extraterrestrials: “In the threatening situation of the world today, when people are beginning to see that everything is at stake, the projection-creating fantasy soars beyond the realm of earthly organizations and powers into the heavens, into interstellar space, where the rulers of human fate, the gods, once had their abode in the planets.”

Reed, with one apt metaphor, connects his water nixie — she of the aqueous depths — with skyscape: at the last, when she returns to her pool after thirty years passed among humans, “her face was transfigured,” the narrator tells us, “radiant as an angel’s.”

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But Tasha Coleman, 15, doesn't want to hear that the pain in her heart is part of a graphable, overgoverning schema of repetitions. She really does say it that way, "There's a pain," and she points with a wickedly polished but raggedly chewed-at nail, "in my heart." Her face in the TV screen is so very hurt it's barely composed into faceness, and it seems to shimmer in front of us, is more like the reflection of a face, in trembled water.

She had spent the night at a girlfriend's home. She woke up on a different Earth, Earth-X, a world where her parents are dead and her older brother ("I love him still" and she makes another heart-tap) is supposedly their murderer. I don't imagine sleep will ever be the same for her again. Or being awake, for that matter. Do they let her walk through the house? What does she think, approaching that bedroom door? "Think" may not be the word for it; what she *feels*, though, she's said—a pain in her heart. I believe it's a "real," physical excruciation she's talking about, is something like a fish hook stitched beneath the cardiac skin.

And she won't stand your hi-falutin' b.s. or mine about the general shape of pain, and its many guises including the Greek myths blah blah blah. She's had it up to here and we can just go fuck ourselves. The only thing she has in the world right now is that pain, in the back-and-forth threads of nucleic jelly in every cell of Tasha Coleman: that pain. There's no assuagement, but at least she has the knowledge that her pain is monumentally singular, never before such agony and never again, and she doesn't want one syllable that will deprive her of this, so take your chart of literary motifs, shove hard, and waddle on home with your butt clamped tight around it.

Later on, I suspect, she'll turn to one of those larger shapes for comfort-ing. An example: in 1945, when *Amazing Stories* published a "factual" article by Richard Shaver, an exposé of the civilization that lives inside our (hollow) Earth, the number of letters from readers leaped from 40 a month to 2,500 and stayed that way for the next four years while the Shaver reports continued. In the Earth live "Deros," evil creatures whose "tech machines" shoot rays that cause our wars and traffic accidents, our cancer and our sexual dysfunction. When "a hobo is arrested while attempting to wreck a train because a 'voice' directed the action"?—*Deros at work!* Like Satan's minions, they relieve us—they relieve a Vonnie Coleman—of a pure responsibility.

Or maybe Tasha will join up with the saucer-spotting priest, awaiting The Grand Arrival, the day salvation will simply be handed over to us, no questions asked, and those who want can leave this vale of suffering in the rounded titanium belly of the Mother Ship. In this cosmology, Jesus Christ is the greatest extraterrestrial of all.

She'll see it—that Organizational Shapes, recurrent matrices, cannot be escaped. They form a unity on macrolevels as surely as we're the momentary cohering of subatomic particles, dot and wave, that dance their stately pavaues in the least of our gestures.

She'll see it—but not now. Now, she walks at night through the house she was born in, whimpering at its familiarity, stopping a moment to feel her own self beat like an ocean in storm at her own self's borders, and clutching—actually pantomiming clutching—her pain to her breast.

I'm going to stretch next to Skyler tonight and love her with all of the luck we've been given (so far) and I suggest you set down this page and do that with somebody too.

Who *is* it we see when we look in the mirror, that rounds the weary corners of our own eyes, furtively, gone in an instant? *Wild man, mild man, monster, saint.*

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This began with the Egyptian Old Kingdom, 2500 B.C., and it can end there well enough. I have a textbook of “religious art through the centuries,” and it starts with the wingèd *ka*—a form of soul—as it flutters over a Pharaoh inside the tomb. It looks like a fledgling hawk, though with the head of a human: the face is concerned.

Many pages later, there's a sample of Marc Chagall's *Message Biblique*. Perhaps you know it: the world, the sky, are done from a palette of pinks, an urgent damask, a more rougey pastel, the range of rose and pouting shell-lip, pink, all pink. And through these heavens glides a single angel bearing a candelabrum. All of the suffering she's seen becomes the accent-lines of her eyes and mouth, with a tenderness. Her face is deeply green: against such pink, she's like green fire.

Is it a prayer? I don't know; it's annealing.