

GERALD BRUNS

## *Almost As If*

*The if-feeling is not a feeling which accompanies the word "if."*  
—Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*

Here is a word  
with a corona of uses  
ghostly intentions  
shady senses  
nevertheless when pressed  
a (mostly) single physiognomy  
*if* (fr. OE *gif*)

what if  
if/then  
if and only if (iff)  
although  
whether  
it were  
an either/or  
it wouldn't matter

but one can feel *if*  
differently  
imagine Iphigeneia  
(called Iphimedeia by Hesiod)  
her fate set to music  
a symphony  
in *f*-sharp major

among suppositions  
subjunctives  
systems  
of suspicion  
as if  
our future  
were junking its alternatives  
into a past that never was

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Hence *almost*  
more or less  
incompletely  
*l'entretemps*  
ellipses  
deferring interminably  
the messianic decision  
  
"if one were  
to take these words  
seriously  
they would  
lead  
to the madhouse" (Blanchot)  
so I take them foolishly  
stopping as I go  
  
our time is nearly up  
our present  
not quite closed  
made of  
nomadic terms  
falling just short  
of arrival anywhere  
  
fruitless conditions  
refractory facts  
useless attention  
qualifications  
scrolling pointlessly  
pale singularities  
defeating the sequence  
of what happens