

All These Old Things

Brenda Cockfield

A Thesis

in

The Department

of

English

Presented in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts in English at
Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

May 2004

© Brenda Cockfield, 2004



Library and
Archives Canada

Bibliothèque et
Archives Canada

Published Heritage
Branch

Direction du
Patrimoine de l'édition

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Your file *Votre référence*

ISBN: 0-612-94604-5

Our file *Notre référence*

ISBN: 0-612-94604-5

The author has granted a non-exclusive license allowing the Library and Archives Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of this thesis in microform, paper or electronic formats.

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque et Archives Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de cette thèse sous la forme de microfiche/film, de reproduction sur papier ou sur format électronique.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

In compliance with the Canadian Privacy Act some supporting forms may have been removed from this thesis.

Conformément à la loi canadienne sur la protection de la vie privée, quelques formulaires secondaires ont été enlevés de cette thèse.

While these forms may be included in the document page count, their removal does not represent any loss of content from the thesis.

Bien que ces formulaires aient inclus dans la pagination, il n'y aura aucun contenu manquant.

Canada

ABSTRACT

All These Old Things

Brenda Cockfield

All These Old Things is a work concerned with history, time, and memory, and how a single object can transport one into the labyrinth of the past. Each chapter takes as its focal point a collectible object, a relic of sorts, and constructs a series of histories and stories around that object using a blend of fact and fiction. Inspired by the theoretical writings of Walter Benjamin, the work is a redemptive one, in as much as it endeavours to salvage the traces of the past that are stored in these relics, through the reminiscences and anecdotes of those who collect them. It is, like Proust's *mémoire involuntaire*, concerned with the way in which objects can function as mnemonic devices, triggering memories deeply submerged and nearly forgotten. Stylistically, as well as conceptually, the work is very much indebted to the historical novels of W.G. Sebald, specifically, *The Emigrants* (1996), *The Rings of Saturn* (1998), *Austerlitz* (2001). Following Sebald's model, the work relies on the first person narration of a single narrator through which other voices and their stories are rendered. Like Sebald's, this work makes a number of obvious intertextual references, and is composed with long sentences, few paragraph breaks, and no quotation marks - all, towards a historical metaphysics in which memory is free to traverse time and space.

... the darkness does not lift but becomes yet heavier as I think how little we can hold in mind, how everything is constantly lapsing into oblivion with every extinguished life, how the world is, as it were, draining itself, in that the history of countless places and objects which themselves have no power of memory is never heard, never described or passed on.

W.G. Sebald, *Austerlitz*

All these old things have a moral value.

Charles Baudelaire
letter to his mother,
December 30, 1857

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I	A rainy night in March - The antique store window - Ms. Oneil's saviour, Joseph Priestley - The mysterious order of chintz - <i>The Lady Paprika</i> arrives - Indo-European Tapestry - A chance radio broadcast - Fannie at the Potteries District - The sudden gust of an unbidden memory	1
II	The junk shop - The paucity of information - Mr. Franklin's collection - <i>Boy with Dog</i> - Franklin's Christmas show - The Writer of Mysteries - A giant Octopus - Ignatius Oto and Tombstone epitaphs - Mr. Peek's mausoleum - A visit to Lakefield - Poor Thomas Traill - Catherine's Flower Press - The Stricklands - The origin of biscuits - The Antarctic Expedition - Down to the last biscuit	34
III	Garbage and Relics in the alley - The apple tree - Marta's box - All of Japan - The music cylinder and cleaning fumes - A pleasant reverie - The Roth estate auction - Calm on the Cypress path - An overwhelming sky - A chance meeting with Henry Roth - Unstable borrowed scenery - Strange Carp - Gomizuno-o's tea house - Tea with Henry	73
	REFERENCES	104

I

During the last year of my studies in literature at the university, a year in which I was to prepare a major thesis on a topic of my choosing, I found myself pulled by an inexplicable force towards various odd objects that I chanced upon in one way or another. These objects, of which there were three in particular, stole my attention away from the focused study I had been slated to undertake, despite all my best efforts to resist. How I came to acquire these items; and how they came to take me down the path of my own history, and the history of others, often occasioning the deepest reminiscences; and how they inspired investigations into the workings of time, and the mysterious world of the collector, is the subject of what follows.

It was a rainy night in March, when I saw the first relic that would come to preoccupy me for the duration of that cold and reluctant spring. I cannot say with any certainty what originally drew my attention to that object on that rainy night; I can only relate the circumstances under which I came to pass by the antique store window in which it was displayed, on a street I had not walked in some time and had nearly forgotten. That night, I walked as one of a small party of literature students heading for a late dinner at a couscous restaurant known to be amenable to shallow pockets such as ours. We had just come from the university where we had viewed a special screening of the Italian film adaptation of Goethe's *Elective Affinities*, and as we walked through the incessant rain, cowering under umbrellas and hats inadequate to the task, it seemed as if Nature was purging the winter toxins - the blackened snow, the salt grit and grey slush - from the cement-cracked streets; as if the time had finally come for a deep spring cleaning and we were among the flotsam and jetsam to be washed clean. I remember, or perhaps I only imagine that I remember, a full moon pressed flush against the night sky, and as we waited at an intersection for the orb of the traffic light to change colour, I wondered if a full moon such as this one was behind the ill-fated attractions of Goethe's lovers. What effect, if any, might the moon have had on them? Indeed, what effect might

it now be having of which we are not wholly aware. The power of the moon on the human temperament is still not fully understood. Though we know it to regulate the tides of the ocean, it remains unclear how its waxing and waning affects those tides that rise and fall within our bodies. And so it is not all together surprising that on full moon nights, from within the locked wards of psychiatric hospitals, all manner of strange occurrences have been known to take place, among them, the howling of patients baying at the moon like packs of wolves. Nor is it odd to hear that the number of deaths as well as births rises on full moon nights, as if Nature endeavoured to find some kind of equivalency between death and life. Can one ever really fathom the forces that govern our course through life? Until we know, and intuitively we know that we shall never know, what these forces are and how they exert their influence, it would be wise not to rule anything out. I thought all of these things as I walked among the others, letting my thoughts intersect with the fragments of conversation around me which, if I recall correctly, alternated between the film we had just viewed, W.G. Sebald's *The Rings of Saturn*, and Walter Benjamin's great unfinished work, *The Arcades Project*; in particular, "Convolute H: The Collector," both of which we had recently read. Were our conversation visible and not merely audible that night, I imagine that it would have looked like small grey clouds hovering above our heads, broken occasionally by a flash of insight, a lightning bolt of thought. Engaged in the conversation, and at the same time, shielding my face from the rain, I cannot say that I clearly recollect what buildings we passed that night, nor which roads we travelled, and I especially cannot say why I raised my head when I did, just in time to notice the antique store window. But in my memory, the stores, restaurants, and houses seem to drift past me, as if it were they and not I that were moving; they float vaguely by, not unlike a merry-go-round, until the antique store window appears alongside of me. And then, through the warped glass, I am struck by the unusual black teacup adorned with a bright floral print. Unable to move for an instant, as happens when something appears that requires not only our eyes to take it in, but involves

a deeper kind of perception, I merely stared at the object in the window which for some reason fascinated me. I am conscious of one of our group commenting that my contemplation of the teacup was a fine example of the disinterested gaze of Benjamin's collector, whose interest in the collectible object is one quite apart from its functional use; and indeed, my interest was not motivated by anything I could plainly identify. For no other reason than that it was raining and we were between destinations, we continued our journey; but for reasons still mysterious to me, this brief scene, which transpired within three or so minutes, took up residence in my imagination where it fermented amidst all the other memories, experiences, knowledge, and emotions that were stored there. Weeks later, I still had not forgotten the object that I had been so magnetically drawn to that rainy night in March, and so I decided to return to the antique shop for another look. Unfortunately, when I returned to the quarter in which I thought the antique shop was located, it was nowhere to be found, and after much toing and froing through the city streets to no avail, I had all but resigned myself to the possibility that I had somehow dreamt the whole event. Just as I was preparing to return home, I overheard a male voice discussing the rarity of antique blue Dutch china. And there, when I turned the corner, just past a children's clothing boutique and two or three narrow flat doors, was the shop I had been searching for all that afternoon, and had in fact, walked past at least twice already that day. It occurs to me now, that were it not for the voice that seemed to come from nowhere - for when I rounded the corner I could not locate the individual to whom it belonged - I would in all likelihood have gone home empty-handed. The shop window seemed completely unfamiliar to me; there was no teacup to be seen through the glass at all, only a wooden rocking chair with a lace table cloth folded neatly over its back; a collection of tin boxes of various sizes; a rather enormous standing rack of costume jewellery; a beaded ladies clutch purse; a porcelain wash basin and jug; a faded photograph, black and white, of a gentleman whose painstakingly trimmed moustache reminded me of Proust; a silver cigarette lighter with a matching

case; an owl, stuffed and glass-eyed, frozen in perpetual flight; a deck of Marseilles tarot cards; a wall mirror set in a picture frame; a blown-glass perfume bottle; and several pill boxes in silver, gold and inlaid mosaic. It took some time for me to register that the teacup I had been using as my landmark had been removed from this odd constellation of objects, and I recall feeling quite disoriented by its absence, as if the floating merry-go-round of my memory had been transformed during one of its rotations. And yet, at the same time, I was certain that I had arrived at the shop I had been looking for, and that I would find the relic I had come to examine further. Inside, the shop was dusky and rather dim; the half light created an atmosphere entirely different from the world outside, and my first impression was that I had stepped into a forgotten time. I slowly wove my way around tables and chests and armoires loaded with dusty treasures, some in more advanced stages of decay than others, and as I moved through the various displays, I could not help but wonder what circumstances had brought these odds and ends together, here, in this shop. What order, if any, had drawn these remnants of other times to this place? How did these objects, collected seemingly without prejudice to classifications of period, type, or country of origin, transcend all earthly limitation to gather in this shabby store on a street I had all but forgotten?

There is something distinctly intimate about the experience of an antique store. I cannot help but feel, at once, both shamed and privileged by the act of holding a stranger's possessions, and it was out of respect for this sensation, rather than for my concern with the angry note - you break you pay - scrawled in red ink, that I reigned in my tactile desires. Whether the proprietor, a Ms. Cornelia Oneil as her business card announced, appreciated my restraint, I cannot say, for she seemed entirely oblivious to my presence. Framed by a sharp slope of ceiling, she sat behind a heavy wood counter in a darkened corner of the shop. She held her head in her hand, and appeared to be in some deep state of reflection, and I remember thinking how much she resembled the angel in Dürer's *Melancholia*, save for her apparent lack of wings. Her breathing was heavy, if

not laborious, and was punctuated occasionally with a choking cough as if something were caught in her throat. To my knowledge, she did not raise her ponderous head once while I browsed around the shop; it was only when I approached the counter, having spied the teacup displayed on a pedestal to her left, that Ms. Oneil showed any interest in me at all. It's chintz, she said, as I picked up the teacup to examine it more closely, I collect it. She then raised her cumbersome body from the low stool she had been sitting on, and pulled from an enormous pile of books and loose paper stacked precariously behind her, a catalogue bearing the title "CHINTZ" in yellow block letters. Placing the catalogue on the countertop, she licked two fingers and with quick flicks of the wrist, began flipping purposefully through the pages, stopping every five flicks or so to re-lubricate her stubby digits, and to take a big gaping breath as if the journey from mouth to page had winded her. It was on the fifth of these repetitions that Ms. Oneil broke into a coughing fit that I feared was going to be the end of her; her face turned pink, then red; her eyes watered and a deep phlegmatic sound emanated from her throat. In spite of the coughs that were wrenching her body, Ms. Oneil calmly bent below the counter and re-emerged with a clear plastic oxygen mask connected to a silver canister just beside the stool upon which she had been sitting. The wrist that had been so proficient with the pages was now engaged in twisting the red gauge on top of the canister which, from what I could tell, released oxygen into her convulsed lungs. After a few deep breaths, Ms. Oneil regained her colour and her breath returned to its normal, albeit grievous, pre-attack rhythm. The mask was replaced to its home below the counter. After all these years, it still catches me off-guard, was all she offered by way of an explanation. There, she said, having returned her attention to the catalogue, the pattern of your cup is called 'Nantwich'. I thought so, but I always need to be certain; I am very particular about these things. She turned the catalogue toward me, her finger marking the pattern sample which did indeed match the busy design of bright flowers that decorated what was apparently now 'my' cup. I inquired whether Ms. Oneil knew the significance of the

name, and in so doing, I inadvertently committed myself to listening to a lengthy, but fascinating narrative. Nantwich, she began, is a district of Cheshire in England; if we know it today, and if, sure as the air you breathe, I am standing before you now, it is because Joseph Priestley lived there in 1758; the man to whom I ultimately owe my life. Joseph Priestley was born on the 13th of March, 1733 at Fieldhead near Leeds, one of six children born in eight years to strict Calvinists. His father Jonas was a woollen cloth dresser of moderate means, and his mother, who died on the night of a full moon just as her last child took its first breath, was the only daughter of a local farmer. Joseph, was the namesake of both his grandfathers, but it was to his paternal grandfather, a serious churchman, that the young Joseph owed his inheritance of a high moral character. We are fortunate, Ms. Oneil continued, to have some of Priestley's letters and memoirs available to us today. They are preserved in one of twenty-five octavo volumes of his writings, collected posthumously, and they stand as an impressive testament to Priestley's untiring pen and active mind. In these, I recall reading, amidst his memories, one early impression of his mother who, as I mentioned, was dead by the time he was six. Priestley writes of the time his mother made him walk the long five miles back to his uncle's house, from which he had just returned, because he had come home with an article that did not belong to him. The article was a pin, a simple straight pin, that the young Joseph had found between the floorboards of his uncle's foyer. Never mind that the pin in question was one of a multitude; never mind that it would not be missed, the fact of the matter was, Joseph's mother had said, that the pin did not belong to him; it belonged, rather, to his aunt who used such pins for hemming. In short, it was with a view to impressing upon him, Priestley writes, a clear idea of the distinction of property, that his mother made him walk the five miles back to his uncle's house, straight away, to return the single pin he had found. To the young Joseph who had hoped to add the pin to a growing collection of curiosities that he hid in a small pouch underneath his mattress, the punishment made little sense. For him, the pin was attractive not because it was useful,

but because of the way it gleamed when the light hit it. Indeed, that was how he had found it in the first place. What Priestley's mother never discovered, and what impressed Joseph even more than his mother's lesson on property, was that on his dejected return to his uncle's house, he made the chance discovery of, can you imagine, another pin gleaming in the late afternoon sun. It was this principle of Chance that came to be at the centre of Priestley's later beliefs about scientific discovery; most notably, it was Chance that led Priestley to his discovery of oxygen, and it is to oxygen, and thus, to Priestley, that I owe my life. At this point, Ms. Oneil paused to reach for her oxygen mask from which she took a good long haul. It was clear from her subsequent explanation of the pulmonary disorder that had been slowly consuming her lungs these past eleven years, and would eventually result in her death, that the oxygen tank had prolonged her life by giving her the breath her ravaged lungs could not generate for themselves. It had, she explained, for all intents and purposes, become a part of her physical body that, like any other part, she could not do without. Of course, Ms. Oneil said, it is ironic that the force that enabled Priestley's discovery of oxygen is the same force responsible for my defective lungs; both are Chance, and Chance is fickle, indeed. Realising that I had been standing for some time, Ms. Oneil gestured for me to take a seat on the Shaker chair beside her, which I did most thankfully. After a reflective pause during which her forehead creased, and her eyes shifted from side to side as if she were skimming the lines of an imaginary book in search of the place at which she had left off, Ms. Oneil resumed her tale. From the start, she began, Priestley was slated for a life in the ministry, a career seemingly predestined by the family's spiritual temperament, if not the family name. And indeed, at the age of twenty-two Priestley became a dissenting minister of a small congregation in Suffolk, and three years later, of one in Nantwich. Yet whatever the likelihood of Joseph's religious career, none could have divined the other paths upon which his irrepressible curiosity and intellectual unconformability would place him. After his mother's death, the young Joseph was sent to reside with his father's sister,

Mrs. Keighley, a lady in good circumstance, childless and a Calvinist. His aunt's house was something of a haven for all the Dissenting ministers in the neighbourhood, seemingly without discrimination to the idiosyncrasies of their beliefs; for in his memoirs Joseph writes, that even the most obnoxious on account of their heresy were almost as welcome to her, if she thought them honest and good men. We cannot know the effect these frequently charged and no doubt stimulating meetings in his aunt's parlour had on the young Joseph's hitherto orthodox mind; but we do know that by the time he left his aunt's house to attend Daventry, a Nonconformist academy, at the age of twenty, a seed of doubt had been planted. The chief trouble seems to have been Priestley's inability to repent for Adam's transgression, a difficulty he never surmounted. Try as he might to accept Adam's guilt as his own, the more Priestley grappled with the idea, the more certain he became that some mistake had been made. I do not wish to belittle poor Priestley's predicament, Ms. Oneil said, but it seems entirely fitting to me that a young man, full of natural urges, would come to doubt his share of Adam's guilt. Whatever the cause, by the time of his admission to Daventry, it was clear that Priestley's adherence to Calvinism had considerably relaxed, and his time at the academy only further opened his curious mind. Priestley's intellectual accomplishments are impressive. Before he entered Daventry, he had already acquired seven languages - Chaldee, Syriac, Arabic, Hebrew, French, Italian and German - in addition to his native tongue; had mastered Gravesande's *Elements of Natural Philosophy*; and was familiar with a number of works of logic and metaphysics. It is not surprising then, that Priestley was a prominent participant in the free discussions that formed a considerable part of Daventry's academic exercises which were unusually liberal and heterodox. Nor is it surprising that by the time he left the academy three years later, the foundations of what would be his enormous industry as a scholar, writer, clergy, and teacher had been firmly laid. It was not until his residence at Nantwich however, that Priestley turned his attention to physical science. There, in the small school he founded, Priestley supplemented his regular lessons with

instruction in natural philosophy, which he demonstrated with experiments. In his memoirs, Priestley tells us, with an almost palpable pride, that it was by entertaining the students' parents and friends with experiments, in which the scholars were generally the operators, if not the lecturers too, that he considerably extended the reputation of his school. Priestley's pedagogical turn to experimentation, seems to have been as much about his desire to liberalise education as it was about extending scientific knowledge, and I have often wondered if it had not been for the former goal, whether Priestley would have ever come to physical science. Who can say with certainty which actions place us on a particular course in life; if there is a course at all? Most historical accounts of Priestley's life, and I have read a few, are constructed around the monumental moment: his discovery of oxygen. Having chosen this moment as *the* decisive one, all other details in Priestley's life seem to either lead relentlessly toward it, or to issue directly from it. Theirs is the story of success; the story of the victory of man over nature. Ms. Oneil paused, put her hand to her chest and held her wretched heart as she took a slow painful breath. But what of the Chance that Priestley appreciated so; what room do these histories leave for it? What might they say of Priestley's comparison of the investigation of nature to a hound that runs hither and thither, this way and that, until he chances upon some creature that interests him. All discoveries are like that hound, Priestley said to his students in Nantwich. When Priestley left Nantwich in 1761, to serve as a classical tutor at Warrington, a much lauded Nonconformist academy, he could not have anticipated that his six years there would be the happiest of his life. During these years, he lovingly married the daughter of an ironmaster; received a doctor of laws degree from the University of Edinburgh for his *Chart of History*, a compilation of eminent men of all ages; made the congenial acquaintance of Dr. Franklin, whose influence shaped Priestley's *History of Electricity*; gained admission to the Royal Society in 1766 for the aforementioned history; and intensively pursued his scientific studies in chemistry and electricity in his small, but well-equipped laboratory. Like an alchemist's chambers,

Priestley's laboratory was filled with stills, alembics, furnaces, burning glasses, and shelves of bottled concoctions and decoctions, strange to the untrained eye. There were also vast quantities of plants, a veritable jungle of them, which Priestley kept because of the way the greenery seemed to clean the noxious fumes that frequently hung in the air after his experiments. What Priestley had innocently observed, and later explored in his work, *On the Purification of Air by Plants, and the Influence of Light on that Process*, was the basic action of photosynthesis and respiration which had yet to be identified. It is reasonable to imagine, Ms. Oneil continued, that Priestley's move from Nantwich, where Nature was quite often his only laboratory, to Warrington, where he experimented indoors in a well-equipped and controlled environment, was a move that affected his scientific method, if not his larger beliefs concerning the spirit. Though Priestley always maintained that all discoveries were made by Chance, it is also true that his experiments became more systematic while he was retained at the academy. So when his friend and fellow teacher, the poet, Anna Laetitia Barbauld, discovered that Priestley had been encouraging his students to bring him as many household mice as they could capture alive, her curiosity was peaked. Though she knew Priestley to be of good faith, and had always admired his inquisitive nature, she also had a deep affinity for creatures of all sorts, and could not bear to think of them meeting anything but a natural end. Mice, moreover, had been recently discussed in her literature class in the context of their reading of a twelfth century Latin Bestiary, in which Mrs. Barbauld had read the curious detail that the livers of mice get larger at full moon. She shuddered to think by what method that small titbit of knowledge had been determined, as she walked the long hallway towards Priestley's laboratory to question him about the mice. Upon her arrival,



her worst fears were confirmed; Priestley had been testing the properties of gases on the mice. It was in protest of Priestley's experiments using animals, which were but one manifestation of a much more pervasive societal disengagement with the natural world, that Mrs. Barbauld was inspired to pen her poem, *The Mouse's Petition to Dr. Priestley*. Tradition has it that the poem succeeded in convincing Priestley to release the mice, said Ms. Oneil, but tradition does not tell us whether it had a lasting effect. Written from the mouse's point of view, Mrs. Barbauld reminds Dr. Priestley of his connection to all living creatures, great and small, whether mice or men; but more fundamentally, she reminds him of his own creaturehood. As a mouse, Mrs. Barbauld was tactful; she maintains a fine balance between her appeals for creaturely empathy; her flattery of the well-taught philosophical mind, which Priestley's was; and her play with the fear, common to those who believe in immortality, as Priestley did, that the worm you crush today, may well be the brother you buried yesterday. Who knows, Mrs. Barbauld reminds Dr. Priestley, where one's soul will go, or where it has been? Whatever the effect of the poem on Priestley's scientific method, it is known that when he died on the 6th of February 1804, he died hoping for the immortality of his soul. Ms. Oneil ended her narrative there, and just as she uttered the last syllable, a grandfather clock I had not noticed, let out three brassy chimes, each separated by an interval of poignant length. It might have been the faded light of the shop, or the effect of being surrounded by all those old things, or perhaps even the meditative state that occurs when one has listened for long time, but I had the odd sensation that all of this talk of Priestley had brought his presence to the room, as if the simple act of remembering him had made such a thing possible. I have since read that Lord Alfred Tennyson, the Victorian poet, claimed that all that was

necessary for him to enter the receptive state in which he wrote his poetry, was the simple act of sounding his name three times, *Tennyson, Tennyson, Tennyson*. It was this sonorous repetition that enabled the poet to transcend time and space, and in particular, to commune with his dear friend Arthur Henry Hallam, from whose death Tennyson never fully recovered. In his elegy to Hallam, *In Memoriam A.H.H.*, Tennyson records his experience of calling up the dead:

*So word by word, and line by line,
the dead man touch'd me from the past.
And all at once it seem'd at last
The living soul was flashed on mine.*

If we are to believe Tennyson, and there is no reason why we should not, then perhaps, word by word, Priestley too touched Ms. Oneil that day in the antique shop, and perhaps, one day when I reread these words, it will be Ms. Oneil I will feel hanging in the air.

By the time I left the antique shop that day, the sun had just passed below the horizon and the streets were washed in the faint light of twilight. I have always been amazed by the twilight hour, its exchange of day for night; and that particular day was no exception. As I walked the long way homewards, the very atmosphere seemed to be vibrating, and when I squinted my eyes, I felt that I could almost see every frenetic atom oscillating to and fro. All forms, trees - maples, oaks, spruce, pines, birch; potholed roads and concrete sidewalks; dogs on leashes; nascent ivy on house fronts; lingering snowpiles; park benches; squirrels on telephone wires; birds nesting in the cracks of old walls; puddles of melted snow; cats in windows; paper litter trapped in bare hedges; the very bricks and wood of houses; my own body - all, seemed to be buzzing or hovering in this magical hour of transition, as if Nature were restless in anticipation of spring. It had been a sunny afternoon, and although I had spent most of it in the false dusk of Ms. Oneil's shop, the earth was still warm. In one arm, I carried the teacup, wrapped in old

newspaper, and in the other, I held the battered Chintz catalogue that Ms. Oneil had referred to in the store. I had purchased the catalogue because I wanted to discover something of the history wrapped around this object; I wanted to know, like Walter Benjamin's collector, something of the epoch, the landscape, the industry and the owner from which it came. As for those details which would forever remain obscure to me - the lips it graced, the conversations it overheard, the households it had resided in - I felt, somehow, that I would be inspired to divine them from a close reading of the relic itself. No sooner, does the collector hold his items in his hand than he appears inspired by them, and seems to look through them into their distance, like an augur, Benjamin had said. The teacup was chipped slightly on the rim, which was fortunate, for when I later looked at the catalogue's price list, it informed me that my single Nantwich teacup and saucer, in perfect condition, was worth 100 Canadian dollars. The chip had lowered its value as a collectible, considerably. The catalogue contained samples of each pattern, ordered first by pottery, and then by name, in alphabetical order. It had been one of the chief aims of this publication, the editors, Sully & Sully announced, to provide a comprehensive record of all the different chintzes produced between the years of 1920 and 1960, the four decades of favour for chintz table and teaware. Anemone, Balmoral, Bedale, Beeston, Cheadel, Chelsea, Clevedon, Clyde, Cotswold, Cranstone, Crocus, Cromer, Delphinium, Dorset, Eleanor, English Rose, Estelle, Esther, Evesham, Fireglow, Floral Feast, Floral Garden, Florence, Hazel, Joyce-Lynn, Julia, June Festival, June Roses, Kew, Kinver, Majestic, Marguerite, Marion, Mayfair, May Festival, Morning Glory, Nantwich, Old Cottage Chintz, Orient, Pekin, Pelham, Peony, Queen Anne, Quilt, Richmond, Rose du Barry, Royalty, Rutland, Shrewsbury, Somerset, Spring, Spring Glory, Spring Time, Stratford, Summertime, Sunshine, Sweet Nancy, Sweet Pea, Tartans, Victorian, Victorian Rose, Welbeck, Wild Flowers, and Winifred, were only some of the delights there were to be had in chintz. I noticed that underneath each pattern swatch in the catalogue, someone had placed a rating in black ink and block letters: BAS, MED., or T.B..

Nantwich, I was pleased to discover, had earned the highest rating, T. B. or Trés Bon, and for the first time, I felt a mild version of the heart-swelling pride a serious collector must feel upon locating a prized item by chance. My prideful moment however, was short-lived; for it was impossible to discern what qualities distinguished a T.B. design from a MED. one, or from a BAS one for that matter, and the more I tried to anticipate a pattern's rating, the more I became aware of what was, to the eye, a completely arbitrary order. In cross-design comparison, it seemed that those designs which were densely patterned were just as likely to be T.B. as they were anything else; nor was colour an aid in discerning how these assessments of value had been made. The matter was no clearer after I compared a number of the so-called 'vital statistics' for particular designs. Date of manufacture, the criteria one would most expect to be of some importance, appeared not to be highly relevant in the order of chintz. Nor was the particular shape of the teacup - whether it had a single or double looped handle, a flat rim or a tuliped one, for example - at all illuminating. Shape was, however, an important factor in dating the piece, but since 'date' was not a meaningful factor, I was effectively stuck in the labyrinthine world of chintz. The only quality which seemed to be of any importance at all, was whether the print covered the entire piece - handles and lids included - or not; complete coverage was more desirable. But since only one of the nine potteries did not completely cover their wares, and since that one pottery was responsible for a mere five patterns in the entire chintz family, this quality too was rather unhelpful. How was it decided then, I wondered, which designs were more collectable than others? Moreover, who decided this? Did chintz collectors merely memorise from some unknown authority which patterns were T.B., MED., or BAS? And if their catalogues were not marked as mine was, might not the ratings differ from one catalogue to the next? What role, if any, did the editors, curiously known only as Sully & Sully, have to play in this? As I turned the pages of my chintz catalogue, I was incredulous. I came more and more to doubt that the ratings, or even the designs themselves, would be the same should I ever chance upon

another copy.

Over time, the history of chintz pottery has largely been lost. There are few records or pattern books still in existence, and the factories which once produced chintz, have either been shut down, or have changed hands so many times over the years, that most patterns are virtually untraceable. While some items have the benefit of a backstamp, identifying the name of the pottery, the particular line, the pattern name and occasionally a pattern number - Grimwades, Royal Winton, Nantwich, 291, for instance - many more do not, and whatever the case, the stamp is not necessarily a credible guarantee of authenticity. Because ownership of a particular pattern was an expensive undertaking, many designs were open stock, and thus shared by a number of firms. And so, it is possible to find that one's Mille Fleurs by James Kent, is also a Marigold by Lord Nelson; or that one's Harmony is also Anemone; or that Rose Du Barry is also Chelsea Rose; or even that one's Silverdale can be purchased with either a James Kent backstamp, or a Royal Winton one. The traffic in pattern designs was encouraged by the geographic proximity of the manufacturers, all of which, at one time or another, were located in the Potteries District of N. Staffordshire. The secrecy that shrouds firms today was hardly possible in the Potteries, where workers from different factories were more often than not, family members or close acquaintances. It is this inevitable sharing of designs and shapes amongst loved ones that is likely responsible for some of the more bizarre, if not freakish mutations in chintzware. The stacking teapot, affectionately known as the 'stacker' within the trade, involved the vertical arrangement of two teacups and saucers, balanced atop a teapot. This particular model was never introduced to the traditional tea-drinking British market, but was exported to North America and Australia where such aberrations were deemed saleable. And indeed, the stacker was, according to Sully & Sully, incredibly popular in these markets. The Countess Bedside set, another North American success story, is remarkable not so much for its little teapot, sugar and cream, nor for its small tray with grooves from which the 'Countess' could extract the

desired items, but rather for its porcelain toast-rack. The toast rack was, if one can imagine, a rectangular plate with vertical porcelain dividers in which slices of toast, four, could be made to stand upright. A small groove for butter was, naturally, also provided. While the Bedside set seemed to suit the fantasy lives of North American housewives, and perhaps also that of their 'Counts', ultimately the product was discontinued. For it was not long before it was discovered that the dividers which separated the toast slices, cooled the toast prematurely, turning the breakfast cold before it even reached the master bedroom.

It is startling to think of the larger journey that chintz has made over the course of time, from the luxurious handpainted tapestries made in India and exported to the wealthy in seventeenth century England, to the cheap and cheerful, twentieth century industrial product made in English factories, chiefly for the middle classes and for export to the continents. If the Indian-based words, 'chintz', 'calico', 'dungaree', 'gingham', 'khaki', 'pyjama', 'sash', 'seersucker' and 'shawl', are in common English usage today, it is because they are the legacy of the trade in textiles from India to Europe which began in the early 1600's. Chintz, or 'chintes' as it appears in the East India Company Trade Records, was the name given to any of the fantastically hand-painted and printed cotton fabrics, then used for clothing, and later, for furnishings. The extension of chintz to chinaware, is strictly a twentieth century phenomena. What attracted early European buyers to the Indian cottons were the superior brilliance and fastness of its colours, which were the result of the Indian craftsman's pre-eminence in the art and science of textile dying. So proverbial was their skill, says the rather wieldy, *Origins of Chintz*, which I purchased second-hand at the university book sale one autumn, that St. Jerome in his fourth century translation of the Bible, likened the lasting value of wisdom to the permanence of the dyed colours of India. Across the waters in Tudor England, on the other hand, the story was quite different. Having not yet discovered the chemical operation of fixing dye to fabric, the state of the art was such that the painted colours of

their linen wall hangings began fading almost as soon as they were hoisted onto the immense walls of the rich. And so it was fortunate for the English when, on March 13, 1613, the very day Joseph Priestley was born over a century later, the spice ship, *The Lady Paprika*, docked in London with a small quantity of chintz, not of the finest quality, but desirable none the less; her arrival marks the beginning of a steady trickle, which was later to become a veritable flood, of Indian textiles into England. The first owners of chintz in England were the wealthy, as is often the case when an item is rare to come by, and the Company directors, who regarded the chintz they hoarded for themselves as an executive privilege. By the middle of the century, however, it became clear to the directors that if chintz were to be more than a mere curiosity for the upper classes, if it were, in short, to be marketed on a mass scale for profit, its patterns would have to be adapted to suit Western tastes without sacrificing any of its exotic Eastern appeal. Toward this end, English traders began sending special design and colour requests to their counterparts in India; eventually, these instructions yielded to actual patterns which the Indian craftsmen were then expected to copy; and this they did most faithfully. But what the English failed to anticipate, try as they might to control the creative process, was the extent to which the symbols and motifs of their patterns were entirely foreign to the Indian eye. Having never seen tulips, carnations, roses, anemones, and other Western flora, the Indian craftsman interpreted them according to his existing knowledge. In this way, the English rose, became the Indian English rose; the English carnation became the Indian English carnation, and so on, with the result that Indian chintz became Indo-European chintz. It is impossible to know what the Indian drawers who transferred the patterns onto the prepared cotton saw when they looked at the English symbols, nor can we say with certainty that there was no parodic intent behind their imitations, but we can be certain that the unique hybrid which resulted, was equally exotic to both Indian and European eyes. More often than not, the fabulous patterns which emerged from this process of interpretation, bore little, if any, realistic correspondence to the natural world,

Indian or European. I remember being struck by a photograph of a late 17th century design I came across in my copy of *Origins of Chintz* which, when I think of it now, perfectly illustrates the fantastical hybridity of Indo-European chintz. This particular chintz was memorable not only for the exuberant Baroque curves of its flowering tree, but also because the tree was rooted in an urn, rather than the traditional rock or mountain, and was flanked by two smaller urns bursting with flowers. I would likely not have been so taken with the image were it not for the coincidence that I had just finished reading Thomas Browne's *Urne Buriall*, an equally exuberant, seventeenth century metaphysical discourse occasioned by the discovery of sepulchral urns in Norfolk. In the wall hanging, a serpentine tree is in full bloom with large glorious flowers, some purely fanciful, and some resembling a tulip, a rose, a carnation, an anemone, and a daisy. A border, in another fabric entirely, has been added to only three of the four sides, leaving the top end open. The border print is an arrangement of angels, nude and winged, in various poses in and around some indiscernible structure; it is as if they are there to repair the damage done by the wedges that have been trimmed from the top and affixed to the bottom sides, and which account for the hanging's imperfect shape and print. It is almost possible, if one mentally undoes the tailoring, to restore the print to its original appearance, before its flowers were so raggedly pruned and the angelic perimeter was added. And yet, were one to actually try to make the print whole again, to recover the original, one would find the task impossible; for its pieces have been stretched out of shape over time, the warp no longer crosses the weft as it once did, and fragments, often mere threads, have been irrevocably lost. It is the urn however, that most captures my attention, for it is in the fantastical treatment of the urn that the gap between what Eastern and Western eyes saw is artfully revealed. The urn, from which the tree winds its way skyward, is a form of European garden urn of the period, decorated with two ornamental handles on either side, and an engraved floral rim. In the foreground, in front of the tree, just above the rim of the urn, a flower garland hovers in an arc, seemingly, in mid-air.

Were it not for the gradual narrowing of the ends of the garland, a quality which suggests that it is anchored to the urn, it would be entirely unclear that what the garland is, in fact, is the urn's engraved, far, inner rim. None of this is readily discerned by the modern eye which perceives the garland as a detached, free-floating chain of flowers. It is doubtful whether many would identify the garland as a rim at all; so entirely fantastic does it appear. Such was the manner in which an Indian draughtsman of the Coromandel coast rendered his perception of the model which an English trader handed to him to be copied. There is no telling whether this was the first time the pattern had been copied, or whether the draughtsman was working from a hanging already produced, but either way, the effect remains the same. In my imagination, the artisan kneels in front of his canvas, which has been laid out on a large woven bamboo mat to protect it from the dirt floor underneath. He is one of only a handful of skilled drawers who transfer designs to cloth, and like them he has been moved by the East India Company to the coast with his family, all of whom work with him in the workshop. Though he is skilled, he is lower caste and poor, and so the Company has had to advance him the supplies required for his work as well as a ration of rice to get him through the dry season. Of the three other families like his, he has had to be careful that those he hires to do the waxing and dye work are contracted only by him, and that they are tight-lipped when it comes to the designs he sends them; his original flare is, in part, what has brought the Company orders to him over another. Kneeling on his mat, he studies a small pattern to his left for awhile, committing it to memory. It is no good, he knows, to stop the flow of his pen by looking back and forth between the pattern and his canvas. Technically, he does not need to study the pattern again, for he has nearly finished the design; but he looks anyway, because he knows that what he sees one day is different from what he sees the next; he knows that he has never seen the same thing twice. Today, for instance, he believes that the flower chain he drew yesterday - the ornament for the inner rim of the urn - is more beautiful than the solid dense darkness of the tree trunk. He sees that the tree sits heavy in its pot,

and that its weight draws the eye down to the roots, instead of up into the blossoms where it may roam free. The tree needs to be softened, lightened, liberated; he can see this clearly. He picks up his pen, and placing it in the centre of the trunk, begins to extend the flower chain across the front of the tree. When it is done, he has transformed the inner rim of the urn into a handle, standing upright, and made of flowers; the tree is now light enough to be carried. And only now is his eye free. He stands, and stretches; the sun is at its hottest, and it is time to rest. He drains the last of his tea, completely unaware of how the chintz designs he creates will be connected to this beverage, three centuries later, in the potteries of North Staffordshire.

It is to Stoke-on Trent, a borough of Staffordshire, that my chintz teacup, Nantwich 291, may be traced. One of the first things that visitors arriving by rail see as they pull into the borough's station, is a full-size statue of Josiah Wedgwood, the infamous potter whose name is synonymous with fine bone china to this day. Wedgwood's partner, a Mr. Bentley, who has no statue, was a close friend of Joseph Priestley's while he was at Warrington Academy, and it is likely that Priestley would have met Wedgwood on a number of social occasions. Across from Wedgwood's statue, is the original site of the Grimwades Brothers' pottery, established 1885. In the late 1920s, Grimwades began to employ a number of villagers to apply the chintz lithographs to their chinaware; the work required nimble fingers, fine eyesight, and a patient nature. Of all these virtues, patience was perhaps the most important, for it was patience that would sustain one through the difficult moments of fitting patterns into corners and around lids and spouts. It is curious then, that Grimwades hired young girls for the job, whose youth often precluded a vast storehouse of patience to draw on. When the wisdom of this policy was questioned by the wife of a visiting industrialist, the decorating manager at the time, a Mr. Fleming, defended his choice with the logic that what the girls lacked in patience, they more than made up for in dexterity. Patience could be learned, he argued, but quick fingers and keen eyes - well, these were the gifts of Nature, and Nature

had been kindest to young girls. Mr. Fleming, of course, did not mention the lower wage he was able to give to young workers. Though the visitor was not convinced, she let the matter rest, because what was clear as she toured the decorating rooms, was that the girls required every shilling they earned; their sweaters were patched at the elbows, their stockings were mended around the heels and knees, and the hems of their skirts had been let down, often more than once. Among the dozen or so girls that the visitor met that day, was Fannie James, a fourteen year old whose small hands had earned her a solid reputation among the other girls who had a saying: If Fannie couldn't stick it right, it couldn't be stuck. Fannie's story first came to me in a radio broadcast that I listened to one rainy Sunday morning about two weeks after I had purchased the teacup from Ms. Oneil's antique shop. I remember stirring a thick pot of Irish oatflakes at the kitchen stove, melancholy with the gray day ahead, when I turned on the radio, hoping to distract myself from the dismal weather. I heard the CBC announcer introducing a reading from a collection of narratives relating the experiences of child factory workers in England who had been employed in the years of the Depression. Having missed some of the introductory comments, I do not know what occasioned the reading of this particular book, at this particular time, for though it was certainly a topic of interest to me, it did not seem to refer to any of the prominent news concerns of the moment. As I listened, over my bowl of oatflakes, I increasingly felt that the broadcast was somehow intended specially for me. It was as if, in having purchased the teacup, I had become a part of the vast historical system which surrounded it. It was true that I had been searching for the details of my relic's existence, but it was also true that like Priestley's hound, I had chanced upon rewards I could not have predicted. The radio reading was one such happenstance. The narratives had been compiled by the late Mrs. Gillam, the wife of a textile mogul, for the purpose of a book of socio-historical significance entitled, *The Little Captains of Industry: Reflections on Child Labour in Depression England*, which I later looked up in the library. In 1937, three years after the Depression had ended, Mrs.

Gillam collected over fifty personal accounts from individuals who had once been child labourers. Of those she solicited for their stories, one individual was of particular interest to her; the origin of her book, she writes in the preface, could be traced to her visit to a pottery in Staffordshire in 1929, where she encountered a young labourer by the name of Fannie James whose capacity to find nature in unnatural places quite astounded her. Eight years to the day that she met Fannie, Mrs. Gillam began her book research by writing to the factory at which Fannie had been employed, hoping to find a clue to her present whereabouts. After some back and forth of letters, Mrs. Gillam was successful in her efforts to contact Fannie, who answered the authoress's request with a lengthy letter relating her memories of her time at Grimwades. It was this letter which was broadcast in my kitchen that rainy Sunday. At the time of the letter, Fannie Burnett, née James, was no longer employed at Grimwades, was married with two children, and had seasonal work as a gardener for the borough. Every spring and summer, Fannie could be found adorning its plain municipal offices, firehouse, hospitals, water works, and the like, with colourful flower arrangements and shrubbery. Fannie James began working at Grimwades pottery in 1929. I left school on a Friday, and started working on the Monday, she says in her letter, and it was three more Mondays before I saw my first pay which was only five shillings and nine pence a week anyway. At least once a day, Mr. Fleming would walk down the aisles between the girls' workbenches, surveying their progress. Without fail, he would stop in the centre of the aisle. If it was a sunny afternoon, the centre would be marked with a shaft of sunlight that one could trace from the window above, down to the floor, where it marked a perfect rhombus-shaped pattern of intense light. On these afternoons, Mr. Fleming was truly in his glory, for he would stand directly in the spotlight, as it were, to deliver the words he delivered every day in absolute earnestness. All aglow, he would say: You must decorate the ware the way you would like to buy it - perfect. Nothing less than perfect will be paid for. Remember this always. And sure as he commanded, I have never forgotten his words, even though they

little serve me today. At first, I had a great deal of difficulty applying the litho to the ware; my hands were smaller than most, although nimble, and I often had to hold the larger pieces between my knees to keep them steady. Compared to most of the girls, however, I learned quickly, and it was not long before Mr. Fleming began to assign the more fussy pieces of ware, such as the lids and fittings, to me. I recall that these pieces paid better than the easier ones, the plates and saucers, for instance, but I also recall that they took much longer to do. At the end of day, it was rare if I had earned significantly more than the girls who did simpler ware, and yet I was far more exhausted. There was little I could do to remedy the situation, for the wares were assigned by Mr. Fleming, who seemed to feel it was rather an honour to be graced with the more difficult pieces. At the same time, if Mr. Fleming did not like one of the girls for whatever reason, he would make a point of assigning her a piece that he knew would cause her grief. It was not at all unusual to see a girl or two, completely despondent over her workbench, having tried the whole day to stick and fit her litho to a tricky spout or handle. The tears were justified, for if a girl could not manage to complete her piece - perfect - as Mr. Fleming would say, she quite simply would not get the wage, and in those days it was not a pleasant thing to go home empty handed. I stayed over many dinner hours to finish pieces, mine or those of others, and often by the time I was done, my fingers ached a deep bone pain. Still, that pain was nothing compared to what I would encounter were I to return home with less than what was expected of me; all my wages were turned over to my father as soon as they were earned, and should I finish the week under the usual, it would not pass unnoticed. One week, Fannie continued, I worked straight through the lunch hour, each day, so that I might make an extra shilling over and above the standard; I did not want the shilling for any useful reason; I had no intention of spending it. I simply found it lovely to look at, and wanted to keep it among my things. Before I went home, I hid the shilling in the toe of my shoe which, as it turned out, was such a safe hiding place that after all I had done to acquire it, I forgot it was there. When I removed

my shoe at bedtime, it hit the floor with that metal sound that coins make, and that was the end of that. The rest, as some say, is history. I imagine, Fannie resumed, you would like to know more about the process by which the plain chinaware was transformed into the chintzware that Grimwades was so busy with then. The steps are few, but each is more fussy than the one before. Each girl had a pot of size at their bench, and using a camel hair brush which we purchased with a shilling of our own money and so were careful to wash clean each night, we brushed some size onto the plain piece of ware. We would then walk down the hallway, past Mr. Fleming's office, to the decorating shop to pick up the litho we had been assigned to apply that day. There was no telling from one day to the next whether one would be given Summertime, or Nantwich, or Clevedon, or Morning Glory for instance, and in any given week there were usually about ten different patterns going at the same time. It was a favourite game of mine to guess what pattern I would be given before I arrived at the shop, and I became quite proficient at anticipating correctly. What I found was that my ability to foretell the design had little to do with focused effort. If I brought too much will to the task, I would almost always guess incorrectly; whereas, if I walked down the hallway with an empty and still mind, I would arrive at the counter with a name already formed in my head. In the beginning, I kept the name to myself, but as I grew more confident, I would say it outloud, and wait for Mrs. Williams to check her list to confirm or deny my accuracy. Mrs. Williams, who ran the decorating shop, seemed to take great pleasure in this activity, and I believe it was as much a game for her as it was for me. At any rate, once we had been given our lithos and returned to our benches, the ware would have dried to the tacky state that was needed for the litho to take. We lay the litho on the piece, working out any large creases or bubbles as we went. We always referred to a model of the piece we were decorating, careful to match it as closely as we might, throughout the process. When the litho was laid, we would journey down the hallway in the other direction, to fetch some hot water, soap, and sponges, which we would then bring back to our bench. And here begins the truly tricky

part of the work; we wet the sponge and used it to rub the litho floral sprays onto the ware; when we were sure the sprays had stuck, we used a soapy sponge to peel the paper off; if we had done our work correctly, the floral pattern would lay so smooth and even on the cup, one would think it had always been there. As much as I have given the impression that my time at the pottery was troubled, Fannie writes, there was a certain peace about the work. Often, I would gaze into the floral sprays and lose myself in the bursts of flowers and colours, and winding vines and leaves. The only real heartbreak of the factory, was that I longed to be out of doors in the open air. But the constant presence of printed flowers lessened that loss, as did the long periods of silence, and the use of my hands to fashion fine things. The imagination is both salvation and damnation, and I was never sure if mine made the work more or less painful; whether it appeased my longings or made them worse. But I would often imagine that the chintzware was my garden, albeit a porcelain one. When I laid the litho on a plain piece of ware, I would fancy I was placing seeds in a tilled plot; when I wet the litho to make the floral pattern stick; I would imagine I was watering the flowers that had sprung from seed; and when finally, I peeled the paper away and used a razor to cut the floral print finely around handles, spouts and lids, I would fancy I was pruning my bountiful garden, cutting away its overgrowth. I often wonder when I think back to my factory days, whether those early years of decorating ware with daisies, poppies, carnations, chrysanthemums, and so on, prepared me for the gardens I tend today; as if staring at those flowers, learning their names, shapes, and colours, was a kind of education to me. For although I do not come from a family of green thumbs, nor did I learn much about the natural world at school, I have been mysteriously graced with the gift of making a real garden grow - perfect, as Mr. Fleming would say. I may not know the name of a particular plant, but I seem to know whether it blooms in spring or summer, whether it likes full sun, part sun, or shade; dry, moist or rocky beds; and yet, I have no notion of how I came to this knowledge; I simply have it. When I was younger, my curiosity drove me to question the why's, how's, and

what for's of things, but as I grow older, I have given up trying to figure out the many things I cannot explain; it is enough for me to know that I may never know. In the end, I suspect my nature is as unfathomable as Nature itself; and that is where I leave it. The afternoon had brightened significantly by the time the radio broadcast ended. That Fannie's letter had surfaced in my kitchen through the conduit of the radio, was a feat as astounding to me as the fact that the sun had pushed its way through the dense and dismal clouds of morning. Both phenomena made me feel oddly humbled, as if I had been chosen to be the recipient of an unexpected honour. And perhaps too, this feeling came from having been reminded, once again, of the existence of forces that exceed my capacity to understand them. In any case, Fannie's account of her experience at Grimwades, inspired me to take a more discerning look at the Nantwich teacup and saucer I had purchased. With my new found knowledge, I was not long in the looking before I decided that Fannie James had, in all likelihood, not been the girl assigned to this particular piece of ware; while the saucer was undoubtedly to Mr. Fleming's satisfaction, the teacup was much more dubious. Where the handle joins the cup, I could clearly see signs of a struggle, and I wondered if this were one of the pieces that had brought some poor girl to tears. The print had faded away in tiny patches around the handle and had lost some of its sheen, and it was possible to see the straight razor edge where the litho had been cut and joined. At the base of the handle, I deduced that there must have been some difficulty with the soap and sponge stage of the process, for if tilted to catch the light, one could detect a sort of black resinous drip which was oddly smooth to the touch. The more I stared at the black drip, the more I began to see it as a dab of paint placed there to camouflage what must have been judged a far graver error. Of its other imperfections, the small chip, more noticeable from the outside, had left a gouge, rough and white, in one of the one hundred and seventeen flowers, not including buds, that I counted for curiosity's sake on the teacup's surface. The same chip manifested entirely differently on the inside of the cup where it appeared as a gap, almost imperceptible, in the gold work

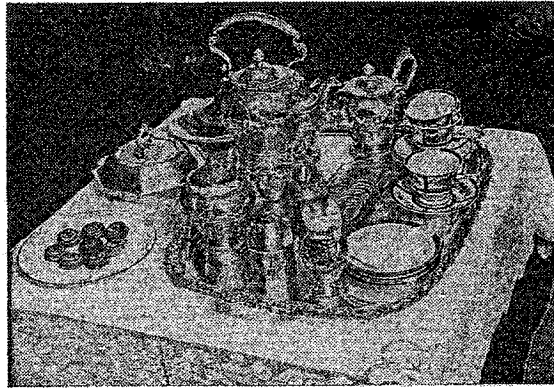
that encircled the rim. Structurally, the saucer was deep with a high lip, a feature no doubt useful for catching the splash of tea from an unsteady hand or an over-full cup. The shape of the cup was odd, for inside and out, one could feel two distinct warps in the mold, and although it would have felt pleasant to wrap one's fingers around its irregular circumference, particularly on a cold day when the fingers needed warming, proper tea etiquette would have precluded anything other than the singular use of the handle.

During my almost Zen contemplation of the teacup, I was surprised by the sudden gust of an unbidden memory. Many years had passed since I had thought of the tea tables my late grandmother would spread out for afternoon tea in her living room. Doris Strickland was born in October 1901, under the light of a full moon, and died ninety-seven years later, under that same full moon light. She came from a long line of tea drinkers that could be traced as far back as the Stuart reign of William III and Mary II in the late seventeenth century. Still, I was most astonished to find a reference to a Miss Strickland having tea with Dr. Samuel Johnson during his visit to Paris in 1775, in a history of tea in the Western world by Agnes Repplier. It is well known that Dr. Johnson consumed oceans of tea, from twelve to twenty five cups a day, and though Temperance was his ally where alcohol was concerned, it held no sway over his tea drinking. It is reasonable to imagine that Johnson, who was constitutionally inclined to sluggishness and occasional bouts of melancholy, consumed such excessive quantities of tea, because it was a stimulant. Johnson's tea-drinking habits were highly particular, and so he was most appalled when during his visit to Madame du Boccage's residence in Paris, she placed her lips around the tea spout and blew, in order to remove the clot of wet tea leaves obstructing the passage. Though Madame was thrilled with her ingenuity, Miss Strickland, who was also in attendance, had no difficulty perceiving her countryman's discomposure over the matter and found herself afraid to cause further annoyance by using her fingers, in the absence of tongs, to take some cubes of sugar. Miss Repplier does not complete the anecdote, so it is unclear whether Miss Strickland suffered bitter

tea or not, but if she was at all like her future descendent, my grandmother Doris, I feel certain she would have dared the manoeuvre. It had been a long while, I could not recall how long exactly, since I had thought of tea with my grandmother. It was not that her memory had no existence for me, but rather that specific moments of time had been temporarily lost, simply for the lack of a trigger to bring them to mind. It was the chance find of the teacup, this object which I had happened upon in the most random of ways, and had purchased for reasons unclear to me, that had brought this forgotten past into the light of day. That this particular memory had not surfaced earlier, was not wholly surprising to me. For years, I had been a religious coffee drinker, and on the rare instances when I had had tea, I would drink it from a mug into which I had unceremoniously tossed a tea bag. A china teacup filled from the elegant spout of a teapot was truly an event of years past. Once my conscious mind apprehended that the chintz teacup had occasioned my remembrance of a memory all but lost to me, I was possessed by a sort of fear for the well-being of my past life. What might have happened to this memory, one which I treasured, should I not have stumbled upon the teacup? What happens to our pasts if Chance does not bring us toward the objects which occasion our deepest reminiscences? Are our pasts so easily annihilated? Do we forget our histories if not reminded of them? Is there a lifespan to our memories, beyond which they are irrevocably lost to us? There is, I sense, something excessively melancholy in contemplating that which may already be lost, or in mourning that which one cannot remember, and so it seems unwise for one to dwell too long on these unanswerable questions that when overthought may lead only to despair. What came to me in that flash, was a mental image of my grandmother pouring tea with a refinement that seemed to come naturally to her, without the slightest self-consciousness, but which was, in fact, the result of her practised training in the social graces; a training which she endeavoured to pass to her children and grandchildren by example. There were, for my grandmother, proper ways to behave in society; certain conventions and rules that when performed with

a generosity of spirit, made the world a more kind and gracious place. Life is sufficiently difficult, she would say, without bad manners added to the heap. In my memory, my grandmother sat behind a low drop-leaf mahogany table, that came to just above her knees. A plain white tablecloth, barely covered the table upon which the tea tray had been placed. The table and surrounding chairs were positioned, as they always were, so that it was possible to look out the French doors to the gardens beyond, which were enclosed only by their own greenery. A prolific gardener, my grandmother could frequently be found on her knees in front of one of the flower beds, or stooped over the grass pulling weeds. Towards the end of her life, she spent less time out in society, and more time in her gardens amidst her plants, some of which she had kept for decades. In a letter that I recently came across from this time, addressed to my mother, she writes: These days, I long for air and pottering about the garden, and the sight of green things is life to me. She meant this more than figuratively. In her later years, she frequently found herself winded without cause, and so she turned towards that which had helped her through so many of the difficulties in her life; her love of nature. She would sit in her gardens, in sympathy with the flora she had nurtured, and been nurtured by, for so many years, mingling her being with that of the dahlias and lilacs, rosemary and sweet pea, echinacea and lavender, and so on. She believed, as did Goethe, that one could not appreciate the treasures of nature, simply by looking at a thing; a different kind of sight was needed, in which one could unite oneself with the life of the plant or creature. For her, this sight was an altered state of awareness, which she described as growing with the plant; I seem to be able to share their ambitions, she said, to feel their struggle toward the light, and to rejoice with a growing leaf. In her garden journal she wrote: Every plant, flower and tree has a history of its own if we would only take the time to read it correctly; but because most do not have the patience to see the dramas unfolding each day in the garden, they wrongly assume that none occur, that plants are motionless and feelingless. But if this were so, how then are we to account for the attachment of my Dodder plant to

a very particular Golden Rod? There are many other plants nearby which would have supplied the Dodder with the support its crawling flowers require, and yet, evidently they did not hold the same power of attraction for the Dodder, and were passed by. What is truly astonishing is that both plants are thriving, even though the clustered flowers of the Dodder are coiled around the supporting stem of the Golden Rod which bore its yellow blossoms, fresh and fair and completely uninjured. Is this not will, and choice, and intention? Is this not, perhaps, love? No matter how engrossed in her gardens, afternoon tea was always served at four o'clock. The tray was sometimes a silver tray, but more often was a lacquered one that she had received as a gift; and though the pattern was chintz, the tray was English. The items on the tray were always the same, for it had been laid according to the etiquette of the time. Among them was a glass kettle, already boiling before the tray was brought, and kept hot by a spirit lamp. She was absolutely inflexible when it came to the lighting of the spirit lamp, which she insisted, should never be lit until after the tray had been set upon the table; she had never forgotten her childhood memory of the pantry maid's apron aflame when its strings caught on fire as she carried the tea tray. Also on the tray, was an empty teapot, a tea caddy and strainer, a slop bowl, a cream pitcher and sugar bowl with tongs, and thin slices of lemon, artfully placed on a glass dish. Of course, there was a pile of cups and saucers, and a stack of little tea plates, each with a cloth napkin folded on top, so that each would lift away with its own napkin. The stack of tea plates looked not unlike a fancy layer cake made of china and cloth, instead of cake and icing, while the teacups piled one atop the other, always brought to mind grandmother's tea time tale of Friedrich Wilhem III, who filled his study with pyramids of porcelain cups sometimes extending well above the eyeline. Behind the tray, on the back of the table, were two, sometimes three, small plates of biscuits, or cake, or pastries, or sandwiches, or even hot bread with butter, covered to



retain the heat; these plates went under the blanket term of 'goodies'. 'Nibbles' were cocktail hour food, but 'goodies' were strictly reserved for tea. Tea pouring was done by my grandmother, and though it was always the same procedure, her easy manner meant that it was never formulaic; tea was a time of intimacy and conversation and laughter shared amongst friends and family and visitors who came to call. It was always the same, and yet always new. As a child, tea was my favourite part of days spent with my grandmother, likely because afternoon tea was one of the few times in which I was not given special dispensation for being a child; my age won me no exceptional favours or considerations beyond those extended to the older tea drinkers. Like them, I was expected to sip not slurp; to make two separate trips to the tray, the first for tea, the second for goodies; to say please and thank you; to excuse myself before leaving the room, and to be good company by participating in the conversation that bounced around the table. Etiquette created a space in which the rules of engagement were the same for all tea-drinkers, and so in following them, I was able to escape the restrictions of childhood; a condition often oppressive to me. My grandmother would first warm the teapot with a little boiling water, which was then discarded into the slop bowl. She would add a heaping teaspoonful of tea to the pot, pour a little boiling water on top of the leaves, and let the mixture steep for half a minute; then, she would add more water, nearly filling the pot. The weak tea drinkers were served immediately, while those who preferred a stronger taste, would wait an additional minute or two before their cups were poured.

The teacup was never filled to the rim; there was always room for additional water, or cream, or lemon, which strangely I cannot say I ever saw anyone partake of. Throughout this ritual, her sterling charm bracelet, a collection of charms so impressive to my fascinated eye, chimed lightly with every movement of her wrist. Over the years, she had accumulated a vast collection, consisting of miniature scissors, a thimble, a bicycle, a skate, a wheelbarrow, a watering can, a feather, a "D" for Doris, a spool of thread, a number of flat silver discs engraved with the names of her children and grandchildren, a book, a teacup and saucer, a highland dancer, a sapphire gem, a quill and ink jar, a garden trowel, and many more which I can no longer recall. Her charm bracelet was her magic circle, she would say, and each charm represented a node of her existence. If one wishes to know me, she said, they need only decipher my collection of charms; it is the allegory of my life. I do not know if anyone ever cracked the code that was expressed in her charm bracelet, or if it could even be cracked, but whenever I tried to divine their significance, her response was always something vague like: yes, it is that, and more; or, that is one way of seeing it; or, I hadn't thought of that. And so, tired of guessing, she remained an enigma to me.

Later that day, long after the fickle sun had retreated, and the moon had made its enigmatic entrance into the night sky, I found myself in my study, as I often am in the evening. In front of me I had placed my Nantwich chintz teacup filled, not quite to the rim, with tea poured from a scalded pot; there was too a stack of books on plant life, to which I had committed the evening for the purpose of identifying the flowers which adorn my teacup. Begonia, Wild Roses, Gloriosa Daisies, and Bellflower, were the most likely candidates I had come across thus far; and yet there was always the possibility, in teacups as in history, that what has been rendered does not correspond to the facts; is not wholly real; and thus, is imagined, in whole or in part. It was a fine thing for me then, so a seventeenth century handbill informed me, that tea removeth lassitude, vanquisheth heavy dreams and melancholy, easeth the frame, and strengtheneth the memory. It

overcometh superfluous sleep, and prevents sleepiness in general, so that, without trouble, whole nights may be passed in study.



III

It was not until July of that same year, just before the ominous Dog days of summer were upon us, that I found my thoughts once again concerned with an object I had not been searching for, nor even particularly aware of. The spring that had been so long in coming had finally yielded to a thick and heavy summer in which the atmosphere felt almost solid, and while the heat was oppressive, the pressure downwards held me closer to the earth. I, for my part, was grateful for the sensation of gravity. I had, since the beginning of the summer, been plagued by a sort of weightlessness that I could not explain, but can only describe as a state in which I was perpetually struck by the overwhelming confusion in which the world exists. I suppose it was by way of ameliorating this feeling, that I developed the habit of taking long walks around the city. At almost any hour, I would walk along the grid work of the streets and laneways, passing through various quarters and divisions, as if to impress upon myself the existence of some pattern or some order of significance. From a bird's-eye view, I must have seemed very much like a small laboratory mouse blindly weaving in-and-out of the carefully planned compartments of a maze, looking for the reward of cheese or crumbs that would mark the end of the experiment. And I must admit, that like the mouse whose searches always seem so frantic to me, there were a few occasions on my walks when I was so utterly lost that the possibility of never finding my way out of the labyrinth seemed quite real. Then, a sort of fear would rise within me, and I would need to sit somewhere, or escape into a shop or café, where I would bide my time until the feeling had subsided. Of course, all of this was wholly irrational, for I merely had to hail a taxi, or ask for directions, or look for some large landmark such as the mountain which protruded from the city's centre in order to quell my anxiety. And yet at the time, none of these solutions came to mind. In retrospect, it seems particularly fortuitous that I did not consider these options, for it was only by retreating into a corner junk shop during one of these attacks, that I came upon the slightly battered biscuit tin which, in occupying

my thoughts, was to provide some distraction for the duration of those hot and sticky days of midsummer. The junk shop, for that is plainly what it was, was stocked full of all manner of odds and ends, mostly throw-away items in such bad repair that I wondered by what curious logic they had been spared from the trash. They were, all of them, victims of time - dolls with their stuffing torn out, blackened pots, warped records, yellowed lamp shades, dented briefcases, and mismatched galoshes - all of these old things, and many more which I will not endeavour to list here, had been thrown upon the shelves, one atop the other, over how many years I could not even hazard to guess. As I waded through the narrow passages, unable to see over the tall stacks of junk, veering around sharp turns and more than once forced to double-back upon hitting a dead end, I could not help but be amused at the irony that I had fled one confusing maze only to seek refuge in another. But where the one had become threatening to me, the much smaller labyrinth of the junk store had the carnivalesque quality of a funhouse, and though its secrets were no less mysterious, they seemed more manageable simply for being contained within such a small space. From my first step inside this tiny warehouse of cast-offs, I was amazed, perhaps even a little shocked, by the sheer disorder of the place, and as I manoeuvred around its piles, I recalled Benjamin's figure of the allegorist. The allegorist, he writes, revels in the scatter of objects; theirs is a mind, and here Benjamin invokes the French poet, Charles Baudelaire, illuminated by the intoxication of things. Judging from the spectacle of junk in front of me, an allegorist had amassed this fortune of ruin and decay which appeared to be entirely random. It was as if a powerful wind had swept through the city streets, grabbing at this and that loose remnant until, having accumulated all that it could carry, it squeezed its vast whirling presence into the small box of these four walls where, with a heavy sigh, it dropped the load that has been here ever since. From what I could see, the only similitude between these objects was the fact of their common presence in this place, and perhaps too, the likelihood that all had been rescued from the certain oblivion of the city refuse pit. But there was always the

possibility, I remember thinking in some distant place in my brain, that I was wrong. What if this seeming chaos was actually a carefully acquired collection? What if its terms were simply unknown to me? That is to say, what if its ordering principles, the very structure by which it was built were obscure to my uninitiated eye? And if this were so, then was it not true that my perception of randomness was not indicative of any inherent disorder, but rather of my own inability to discern the terms of that order? I have since read a Borges story in which the author recounts a certain Chinese encyclopaedia in which animals are ordered according to: (a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) sucking pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, (l) *et cetera*, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies. And it seems to me, that it could have been just such a taxonomy behind the otherwise incongruous ensemble of objects. I would have liked very much to inquire about the nature of the shop and its logic, if any, but not a single soul was to be found anywhere, and though the absence of a shopkeeper was unusual, it seemed somehow appropriate to the place. Indeed, the more I looked around, the more I began to wonder if I had not mistakenly entered into someone's storage space, for not only was I the only person about, but there was neither a service counter nor a register to be seen. And so later when I wished to purchase the biscuit tin that I had accidentally kicked as I turned a corner, I was at a loss as to how to go about doing so. The tin, in response to my foot, sent out a brief but loud metallic ding, and for an instant I was greatly relieved to be alone in the shop. I likely would not have paid the tin any further attention were it not for the circular portrait of a boy holding a dog on its lid, which reminded me of an image I had seen before but could not then recall. Were it not for the portrait, I may not have bent down to pick the tin up, but when I did, I was caught in the grip of some form of attraction which I still can not wholly explain. I can only describe the feeling as a kind of magnetism; a force that kept my hands on the tin's surface. In

thinking about this sensation now, I am reminded of the age-old practice of dowsing whereby a divining rod, often no more than a forked branch from a hedge or tree, is used to locate minerals or springs of water hidden beneath the earth. Science has, for the most part, been reluctant to acknowledge the accuracy of dowsing, tending instead to dismiss it as folklore or the superstition of miners and well-diggers. However, on the occasions when Science has admitted to dowsing's success, it has explained the phenomena in terms of the laws of magnetism and the magnetic properties of matter. But what Science has yet to account for, is how it is that the divining rod will not perform its magnetic dance for everyone. It seems that despite the laws of magnetism, the rod is discerning, answering only to the few who, it is said, possess the power. I have never tried dowsing so I cannot say if what I felt that day in the junk store was of the same nature or not, but whatever it was, the magnetic sensation made the biscuit tin all the more fascinating to me. There was, however, still the matter of finding a shopkeeper to pay for the tin, and as I had already toured what little floor space there was and had seen no one, I rang a small brass bell that I had found nestled beside a piece of varnished driftwood, and called out a few hellos which predictably went unnoticed. The longer I held the tin the more I was determined not to leave without it; and so finally, I took my wallet from my rucksack, removed a twenty dollar bill and placed it on a chair near the store's entrance, and made my way homewards half-wondering if I had been the victim of some hidden camera experiment or study of human behaviour.

I suppose it was something akin to a collector's interest that was behind my subsequent efforts to research the biscuit tin's origins. From the outset however, my attempts were plagued with minor difficulties and setbacks, not the least of which was the sheer paucity of information on the subject. While I had discovered early on that old tins, not just biscuit tins, but also mustard, coffee, peanut butter, prophylactic, toothpowder, potato chips, matches, razors, honey, laxatives, lard, coconut, tea, tobacco, talc, cough drops, sweets, spices, taffy, ice cream, maple syrup, aftershave, marshmallows, popcorn,

peanuts, hand soap, wheat germ, baking powder, oysters, cacao, and cottage cheese tins were all collectible items, it was not until a month after I had skulked away from the junk store with the tin in hand, that I managed to locate anything tangible on the subject of biscuit tins, and even then, many of my questions remained unanswered. The source came to me through a local bookseller, Mr. Fitzgerald, to whom I had turned many times in the past, and always with great success, for aid with unusual subjects. After some calling around his network of sellers and suppliers and friends, many of whom happened to be collectors of various sorts, he came upon a titbit of some interest. He told me that one of his bridge partners, a Mrs. Ashbury, recalled a visit to London some thirty years ago, during which she had passed a lovely afternoon at the Victoria and Albert Museum. Mrs. Ashbury had gone to the museum with the intention of seeing its collection of seventeenth and eighteenth century chintz tapestries. The tapestries, however, had been removed to another site for the holiday season, and so hoping to salvage her visit, she elected instead to attend the special Christmas exhibition entitled simply, *British Biscuit Tins*. The exhibition, she soon discovered, consisted of no fewer than three hundred tin biscuit boxes, all lent to the museum by an anonymous collector. What she remembered most about the exhibit was the way in which these containers, some of which she recalled from her childhood, had been so finely wrought even as they served a functional purpose. Their beauty, she said, was almost in spite of their usefulness. After speaking with Mrs. Ashbury, Mr. Fitzgerald had taken the initiative of contacting the museum's Department of Circulation, which informed him that upon the death of the benefactor, a Mr. Michael J. Franklin, the tins had become part of the establishment's permanent collection. Mr. Franklin moreover, had written a book on the subject which was available for purchase should I desire a copy. I left Mr. Fitzgerald's book shop that day, feeling invigorated by my good fortune, and as I walked homewards I could not help but wonder why all of my previous efforts - the loan requests, library perusals, visits to antique shops, inquiries of all sorts - to trace this tin relic had come to naught, and how it is that on one day and not

another, the universe seems to shift in one's favour, and one is permitted to make their way through the world, for a short while, almost without effort.

It is no exaggeration to say that had Michael J. Franklin not chanced upon a stunning eight book collection of Sir Walter Scott's writings in an English market stall one Sunday morning in the early 1950's, a chapter in industrial and social history, no less a chapter in the realm of collecting itself, would not be available to us as it is today. What Franklin discovered when he tried to extract one of the handsome leather bound volumes from the rather exceptional set of Scott's works, was that the set was, in fact, a biscuit tin with a hinged lid. Franklin was positively delighted by the *trompe l'oeil*, and as he stood in the somewhat damp air of the market stall contemplating the tin that had so genuinely fooled him, he began to think of how apt it was that the books the tin represented were the *Waverley* series. It is the realism of those novels too, he might have thought to himself, that seduces one into believing that history actually did unfold in just the way Scott writes it. It is possible to view a photograph of Franklin's first find in the posthumously revised edition of his original book, a copy of which arrived at my door a mere thirteen days after Mr. Fitzgerald had placed the order. But when one looks closely at the photograph, one will find that the so-called *Waverley* tin is actually a replica of an eight volume collection of not Scott, but Dickens novels. And so, in discovering, like Franklin, that things are not always what they seem, the contemporary reader can experience the same kind of surprise that delighted Franklin all those years ago. The *Waverley* find marked the beginning of Franklin's extraordinary collection of biscuit tins, which he amassed over the course of his adult life, and which grew to such quantities that he was forced, a number of times, to build extra shelves on which to house them. Within a year of his purchase of the first tin, Franklin had collected over one hundred of the roughly forty thousand different biscuit boxes designed for manufacture in Britain between the years of 1868 and 1939, and it is evident from his frequent use of the word 'fun' when describing his finds, that collecting was an experience that gave him great joy

even as it alienated him from his family and friends who, they felt, had been forsaken for some decorated scraps of metal. It was not just that tins were considered insignificant or unworthy of a serious collector's attention, it was more true that they had not been considered at all. Never to be found in the proper antique store which carried only those relics that had already been deemed desirable and rare, Franklin found the bulk of his biscuit tins in junk shops and market stalls where they were displayed, not on a visible shelf, neatly arranged, but more frequently in a box, on the floor, with a sign marked - Anything in this box under 2/6d. Consigned to the darkest corners of shops which based their trade in items that were one step removed from the rubbish heap, biscuit tins were in need of redemption. For Franklin, above and beyond their often unique shapes - tins were shaped into handbags, teapots, cottages, spinning tops, concertinas, suitcases, lighthouses, pillar boxes, clocks, picnic baskets, vases, milk churns, paint palettes, tables, trunks, garden urns, fire engines, jewel cases, race cars, pool tables, wallets, violin cases, hampers, bookstands, bird's nests, greenhouses, globes, dinner plates, horseshoes, field glass cases, chests, lockets, pin cushions, and others still - and beyond their often exquisitely decorated surfaces in all manner of prints - tartan, chintz, and oriental - and all manner of textures and materials - cloisonné, mosaic, embroidery, leather, reptile skin, wood, brick, marble, pewter, straw, wicker, brass, tortoiseshell, porcelain, iron, and paper - above and beyond all of these design elements, which themselves had considerable appeal, what Franklin saw in these tins that others did not, was the way in which they reflected social history. There were the obvious markers, such as the commemorative tins of such monumental events as wars and royal weddings, coronations and jubilees, and of celebrated individuals from Lord Nelson to Lord Tennyson, from Burns to Shakespeare. But it was the tins which were less conspicuous that most interested Franklin. Not unlike an archaeologist, Franklin read the often cracked, scratched, and rusted surfaces of tins for what they might reveal about the era and the population for whom they were made and to whom they were sold. In studying the design of a tin, he

could grasp a sense of the particular fashions and artistic styles that were then deemed popular enough to be featured by designers and biscuit manufacturers in their annual series of tins. Tins were made, for example, to resemble Wedgwood china, Japanese vases, and paintings from the Louvre; to meet, if not also to contribute to, the desires of the growing middle class for items which appealed to their higher sensibilities and yet would always be out of reach of their pocketbooks. It is, I suppose, in this category that the biscuit tin which I purchased might be considered.

When I first brought my tin relic home, I began my search into its origins by trying to place the portrait that had caught my eye on its lid, for I felt certain I had seen it before. The portrait is framed by a print not unlike the Japanese Imari pattern of Derby porcelain, with its panels of stylised flowers and vines in gold, red, and black. The image itself is of a melancholy boy holding a small dog who seems no less melancholy than his human companion, although we do not, of course, really know what the terrier feels. But it seems safe to say that his mouth, frowning between his slightly drooping jowls, and his eyes, black and glassy, conspire to suggest a certain dispiritedness. It was not long before I decided to flip through some art books and old museum catalogues in search of the portrait which, rather to my surprise, I never actually found. The closest I came, and what I now feel must have been in my mind when I first saw the tin, is a painting entitled, *Boy with Dog* by Jean Baptiste Greuze, the master of the sentimental genre of the late eighteenth century. Comparing the two pieces side by side, I cannot help but think that the tin's artist must surely have held Greuze's *Boy with Dog* to a mirror and painted the same boy with a different dog from the portrait's flipped reflection. It is the similarity in the features of the face - features which made Greuze famous for his children's heads - that convince me that an unknown artist sat at his bench in the design workshop of a metal box factory imitating the master some one hundred and seventy-five years later. For if one focuses only on the face - the eyes, lips, cheeks and nose - of each portrait, one will find the same perfectly arched eyebrows, the same dark almond-shaped eyes with a

speck of light within and a glimmer on the lower lid, the same little bulb on the end of the nose, and the same cheeks flushed and delicate, and overwhelmingly compared in the literature on Greuze's work to budding roses. But it is truly the lips, somewhat thin yet always soft in appearance, and creased at the corners with an extra turn of the brush that convince me of the master's influence. Like the tin's painter, Greuze too had once worked amidst factory-like conditions, turning out pictures that had been copied and recopied, in the studio of his first teacher, Grandon. And it was in these early days of imitation that some say Greuze first formed the habit he was never to lose of painting the same features over and over again in each of his portraits, all the while failing to capture the deeper emotions or character beneath the surface. A lack of sincerity, and poorly painted drapery, are the two criticisms most frequently levelled at Greuze who quite conceivably would not have attained the celebrity he did, were it not for the fortunate fit, for a brief time, between the period in which he lived, and the subjects which he painted. Having stuffed itself of its own indulgences and baroque excesses, aristocratic society before the Revolution was ready to put away its perfumes and paints, at least in theory, and return to the simpler virtues, such as, for instance, the love of a boy for his dog. At the time, Greuze's friend and supporter, Diderot, was busy writing his almost unreadable *drame bourgeois* and praising the very return to virtue which Greuze was then capturing in paint in his various moral pictures and portraits. The inspiration for these works of art, and indeed some believed the very salvation of society itself, was to be found in the simple lives of plain folk, namely the poor, whose superior virtue - their honesty, good natured manner, generosity of spirit, et cetera - was rooted in their hardworking domestic lives. It is unclear how it is possible that Greuze, in particular, who had been raised from a family of bakers and slaters, failed to untangle the mess of ideology which enabled the state of poverty to be romanticised by those who were distinctly responsible for it and so, who had every interest in perpetuating it. But it is likely that Greuze's exceptional vanity stood in the way of any kind of measured consideration of the more problematic aspects

of his age, if not also of his work. That Greuze was the man of the moment is perhaps confirmed by the easy way in which his work fell into disfavour after the massive upheaval of the Revolution, and Greuze himself, then poor and aged, was practically tossed to the gutter. And like those of humble estate whom had inspired his images, Greuze was forced to work for his daily biscuit, selling his paintings at astonishingly low prices to an age that had forsaken him for the radical style of Jacques-Louis David. Goodbye, Greuze said to his friend Barthélemy on his death-bed, I shall expect you at my funeral. You will be all alone there, like the poor man's dog. Although there is no evidence to confirm my suspicion that the unknown tin painter used Greuze's *Boy with Dog* as his model, I am certain in some inexplicable way that some bond existed between the two artists who shared, if only remotely, a desire to paint the same sentimental subject matter. And less remotely, perhaps it is even possible that the tin artist saw in the master, something of himself - some affinity across time that compelled him to paint, yet again, the very features Greuze painted nearly two centuries earlier. And is it not a strange repetition in the warp of time, like the slightly distorted answer of an echo, that Greuze's works which are so famous for idealising bourgeois morality, should resurface in the twentieth century in the homes of the middle classes, mass-produced on the lids of biscuit tins?

It was not until Franklin had already collected his first few hundred tins that he rather doggedly turned his attention toward the task of finding out more about them. Though his interest was keen, and his will vigilant, the success of the task was not a question of either; the truth of the matter was that the material he was seeking simply did not seem to exist. Reference libraries were of little use, for not a single book had been published on the subject, nor were the biscuit manufacturers themselves a positive source. I wrote to each in turn, Franklin tells us, and almost without exception, they replied along the same lines; they really did not know anything about their tin containers of the past, and no, there was no sense in my going to see them, as I had suggested, as they kept no

records that would help in my quest for documentation. Franklin travelled to each of the various biscuit makers anyway, and though his visits confirmed that what they had originally told him was essentially true, he did manage to unearth traces of the past in out-of-the-way cupboards and forgotten filing cabinets. Whether for lack of space or interest, whether by wars, company moves, mergers, name changes, product changes and closures - over time, in all these movements of expansion and contraction, an untold number of documents, tin samples, design patterns, and catalogues were irretrievably lost. Like Benjamin's angel of history who tries desperately to put the ruins of the past together, to make whole what has been smashed, but knows that he can never repair the damage, Franklin too lamented the impossibility of fitting the bits and pieces of history together. Perhaps it was this desire for some kind of coherence to emerge from the wreckage of time that motivated Franklin to approach the curators of the prestigious Victoria and Albert Museum with regard to an exhibition of his biscuit tin collection fifteen years after the *Waverley* find. If one were to put a sample of each tin in one place, all gathered together, Franklin might have said to the curators, one would be able to chart, over the course of nearly a century, the way in which history moved, not in any straightforward way, but rather how it circled back to reinvigorate older styles, how it left off here only to be picked up there, how it stopped entirely without warning, and how many different eras had made their mark on a single piece of shiny metal. The exhibition, the success of which exceeded all expectations, proved to be an important though bitter-sweet threshold which brought, among other things, the dubious reward of legitimacy. After the exhibition, biscuit tins were, for the first time, finally recognised as the colourful markers of social history that Franklin had always believed them to be. Rather less desirable was the unanticipated increase of the number of collectors in the field as newcomers bought out the junk stores, and the tins which were already rare, became increasingly difficult to come by. It was not long before tins were being priced at extraordinary and prohibitive sums, and soon the odd biscuit tin could be found in an

expensive antique store, resting on a carefully polished sideboard or in a handsomely carved cabinet. But what was gained in respectability and popularity came at the price of something far more dear to Franklin. During the time the exhibition was on, I lost some of the sense of fun I felt towards the tins in all the years I had been acquiring them, Franklin writes. I felt too much was being written and talked about them, and although magnificently displayed in the museum cases, it seemed somehow alien to their original intents. Most, at best, had only ever been displayed on a mantelpiece in a poorer home. I recall, as I reread Franklin words, a Japanese film in which a client at a local bathhouse is well known for his habit of singing opera in the shower. When, however, the singer dresses in an elegant tuxedo and brings his bravado to the stage where he is to perform in front of an expectant audience, his vocal chords seize and he cannot sing a note; it is as if the formality of the surroundings is not true to the spirit that moves him to song, and so try as he might, he is unable to make a sound. The singer, for his part, was never able to perform his beloved opera without a steady stream of water beating upon his head. As for Franklin, we do not know if he ever fully recovered the kind of delight he had experienced throughout his many years of collecting, and thus we can not really say what price he paid for history's sake.

I cannot help but feel a certain bond with Franklin as I too, one continent and five decades between us, struggle with the many interstices and labyrinthine dead ends of historical research on the subject of biscuit tins. One day in the university library, I had been skimming the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* on the topic of Tin, the unalloyed metal, when the sheer weight and cumbersome size of Volume xxiii, made it necessary for me to find a seat. I had, by this point, already been in the library for hours combing the newspaper indexes for any mention of either James Peek or George Hender Freat, the two founders of the Peek Freat Biscuit Company, whose biscuits had once filled my tin, only to find the rather disappointing result of a death announcement for Mr. Freat consisting of a scant three lines in *The Times*, dated October 19, 1903. Tired and

somewhat discouraged by the limited results, I had turned to the encyclopaedia with the thought that a more general search in a related field might be more fruitful. The squat stools that one finds scattered between the aisles of most libraries have always been a great comfort to me, and so too on this day when I sat down onto one and listened for the inevitable metallic smack that comes when the base hits the marble floor. I have discovered over years of library research, that aside from the relief to the legs and back that sitting provides after long hours of standing, there is an additional reward which is even more valuable to me. I have found that the physical shift tends to provide a commensurate shift in mental perspective; simply by sitting down, I am faced with a whole new array of books and subjects and writers that I had not been searching for and could not anticipate, and it is this element of the unexpected which tends to restore some vigour to my thinking, which after the first few hours tends to diminish exponentially for each additional hour I prolong my stay. Certainly, the harsh glare of the fluorescent lights, to say nothing of their incessant hum, and the stifling density of recycled air that has been pumped and repumped, time and time again, have much to do with this sense of fatigue that characterises the modern library experience, and it is no wonder that one can easily count on both hands the number of sleepers snoring, drooling, and dreaming over an open book as if absorbing the text by sheer osmosis. At any rate, I have always considered this small action as belonging to the genus *holidaea*, for although of a different scale, it results in a renewal that is, in principle, not unlike that which comes from a more significant change of scenery. Once seated, my habit is to pull from the shelf whatever book is directly in front of me, and in this manner, I have come upon all sorts of knowledge that I otherwise may not have come upon, and which is quite often relevant to whatever I have been searching for, or whatever has been occupying my deeper thoughts. On rare occasions I have become so engrossed with my selection that it has completely overwhelmed my original purpose, and in these moments, I have found it best to surrender to my new interest and resume my work another day. On this particular

day, the book which appeared in front of me, so the frontispiece announced, bore the extraordinary title: *Encyclopaedia of Superstitions, Folklore, and the Occult Sciences of the World: A Comprehensive Library of Human Belief and Practice in the Mysteries of Life through more than Six Thousand Years of Experience and Progress including Hypnotism, Clairvoyance, Telepathy, Spiritualism, Character Reading and Character Building with all the known Powers and Wonders of Mind and Soul: Volume.1.* Opposite the title page, was an engraving which struck me at the time as a sort of emblem of my situation, for it showed the ancient figure, the Writer of Mysteries, enthroned upon a seemingly impenetrable pile of riddles and secrets, pen in hand and papyrus spread on her lap. Half-turned towards some vantage point outside of the frame, she appears to be in the process of sketching something far off in the distance as a wind from the west turns up the corner of her page and sweeps her long hair from her back. The quality of the print is such that it is difficult to identify the many Mysteries that make up the heap upon which she sits, and as I tried, a memory of the many indistinguishable piles of things from the junk store came into my consciousness, and I was instantly overwhelmed by the fear that I was destined to forever be in contact with things whose significance I would be driven to, but would never be able to decipher. I felt, in that first impression, as if the image had been put in front of me to tease or to taunt me, to remind me of all the hours I had wasted in unsuccessful searches for answers; such was the timbre of my discouraged mood. But by the time I had returned from the copy machine with a reproduction of the image, I felt a sort of elation uplift me as I thought further about the existence of Mystery in the world, and the sheer wonder of things we still do not know, cannot explain and have yet to discover. And I recalled how, just a few days before, I had clipped from the newspaper another image that, so powerfully odd, had filled me with awe. It was a photograph of two scientists measuring a giant Octopus, the size of a collapsed air balloon, found dead on a beach in Los Muermos, Chile; no similar species has been found in Chile in over a century, says the caption. It is absolutely unfathomable to grasp

the vast range of sensory knowledge that that Octopus must have acquired over its long lifespan as its tentacles, each a miniature brain, sucked along the sea floor storing its impressions in a strange and unique language. To consider the rarity of such a beast is astounding. Not a single sighting, at least one that has been noted in the public record, in more than one hundred years. And so, not unlike babies who see everything as if for the first time, never suspecting that the new world they examine has been there all along, this fantastic creature has, for most of us, never existed at all; until, the revelatory moment when it washes up freakishly deflated on the shore. In that moment of first sight, perhaps



the slight tingling exhilaration we sense in the back of our brains is not the awe of something new, but rather the apprehension of some deeply submerged ancestral memory, some dimly held sensation of a time, far distant, in which such creatures existed not because they were more readily seen, but because one simply understood them to exist. As it is, it is only in the Octopus's death that we are reminded of what might possibly live. That this was not always so, is suggested by the various Bestiaries that are available to us today. My copy of a medieval Bestiary, for instance, lists among its creatures, all once believed to be in existence, the Manticora - a beast with a lion's body, a man's face, a stinging tail, and a ravenous appetite for human flesh; the Yale - an antelope-like creature as big as a horse with the tail of an elephant, the jowls of a bear, and outlandishly long horns which, one forward and one back, move as the needs of battle dictate; and the Basilisk, the king of serpents, the mere sight of which is deadly,

save to the weasel which is its only conqueror. The seventeenth century naturalist, Thomas Browne, was a firm believer in the Basilisk. Browne maintained that the serpent could indeed kill with a look, by releasing an airborne poison. For Browne, the proposition was not at all fantastic; for were not plagues and pestilentiall Atomes carried by air? Before dismissing any of these creatures as entirely fabulous, it is worth considering that several venomous reptiles do spit their poison; that in Kenya there is a breed of cow with horns that point one forward and one back; and that in Andalusia in 1930, a man was mobbed by villagers who mistook him for a Manticora. All of this was in my mind when I reshelved both the *Encyclopaedia of Mysteries* and Volume xxiii, and abandoned my quest for traces of the elusive James Peek and George Hender Freen with a renewed understanding that there are questions to which we may never find the answers despite all the promises of a house of knowledge like the modern library.

It was not until some time later, that I was given the unexpected token of a photograph of James Peek's grave. A friend of mine had recently resurfaced from a brief sabbatical which he had spent exploring various cemeteries throughout the British Isles. His was not a fascination for the dead per se, but rather for the way in which the dead have been memorialised over time, and for the nine or so odd years I have known him, he has made a hobby of documenting some three thousand grave sites, analysing the aesthetics of tombstones, mausoleums and sepulchres. A professor of comparative literature, Ignatius Oto was introduced to me at a seminar in which he was presenting a paper entitled: "Haiku and the Occidental Dead: The Tombstone Epitaph." Oto, despite his surname was not Japanese as I had expected, but Hungarian, and over a pint of well-aged stout after the conference, he explained that the spelling of his last name, originally Otto, was a misprint that had occurred at the time of his grandfather's emigration to Canada in the late nineteenth century. We simply never bothered to correct the error, he said, and I often wonder if it was not the subtle but pervasive influence of this name over time, that fostered my insatiable passion for Japanese literature even as I was being

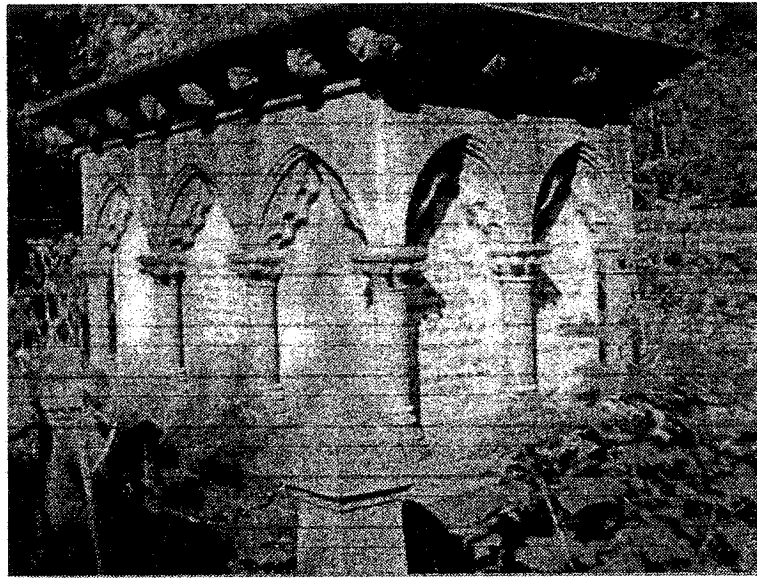
weaned on goulash and strudel. When I met Ignatius some nine years ago, he had already studied numerous graveyards, and was, at that time, engaged with the study of the tombstone epitaph. Of the range of possible epitaphs - those lifted from the Bible or some other holy book, from a philosopher, a statesman, or a poet - Ignatius had severely curtailed the field by considering only those inscriptions which were original texts, which is to say that unless it were actually the grave of Rilke, Rossetti, or Wilde, et cetera, their borrowed verses were overlooked. Such determinations meant, of course, that Ignatius had the ability to make these decisions, and it is true that I have never met anyone with such an immense cache of literary knowledge at his immediate disposal. It is the minor poets who interest me most, he explained; the ones whose only publication may have been the granite face of their tombstone. At the time, Ignatius was exploring the notion of the epitaph as a poetic form analogous in certain respects to the traditional Japanese Haiku, and although it was a parallel that required some imagination and much forgiveness, I still remember feeling, as I listened to his seminar that day, that I had encountered a mind of a rare and exceptional sort, and I cannot say that I have ever had reason to qualify this first impression. The essence of each form is that they *are* Essence; a distillation, a heart, a core, a planet, a pearl, he said in his seminar. Each conveys a world by barely speaking of it; It is life on the head of a pin. A bachelor all his life and a recluse by nature, I have never had any difficulty placing Ignatius amidst the monuments of the dead, wandering from one to another with their epitaphs on his lips. He stands, in my vision, on an unprotected heath, the wind broken only by his body and the uneven gridwork of the gravestones. His hand shades his eyes from the sun as he stoops slightly, concentrating on the weather-worn letters chiselled into stone which he sounds out slowly into words. And as he pulls his notepad from his breast pocket to record the message, he knocks his glasses from their provisional resting place in the V of his jacket front, onto the ground, where they fall just beyond his feet. When he bends to pick them up, one hand holding back the longish hair which is always in his eyes, he comes face to face

with the very letters he has been struggling to discern, and it is then, his fingers tracing the indentations like a blind man, that he discovers a verse that is familiar to him. It is that of the Japanese Zen Master and poet, Dōgen:

*Coming, going, the waterbirds
don't leave a trace,
don't follow a path.*

This is, I suppose, how I have always seen Ignatius. It was this devoted gentleman who, knowing that I had been searching for information on the founders of the Peek Frean Biscuit Company, provided me with an image of the Peek family monument in which are interred James Peek and at least three other members of the Peek family. It struck me as rather strange, bizarre even, that the only information I had managed to acquire up to this point on the founders of the biscuit company happened to be that which suggested only that they had once lived and were no longer living. As to the qualitative details of their lives, Mr. Peek and Mr. Frean were still only trade names on a biscuit package upon a grocer's shelf. Had I been a more suspicious person, I may have devised a fairly convincing detective fiction around the fact that such evidence of their deaths was certainly not, in the absence of other details, proof positive that they had, in fact, actually lived; for neither a mausoleum nor a twenty seven word newspaper obituary are beyond fakery; on the contrary, they are perhaps the most convincing kind precisely because they render death in its legitimate public forms and language.

The Peek mausoleum is a Neo-classical structure, and though not unusually large, it is sufficiently ostentatious that it is rather unremarkable in a cemetery which has the exclusivity of an affluent neighbourhood. The Beetons, the Gallups, the Doultons, Baron Julius de Reuter, and Sir Henry Tate, all join the Peek family amidst the lush flora and carefree birdsong of the West Norwood Cemetery in London. It is no huge demand on the imagination to envision these shades in their ether world, gathered together underneath one of the large Yew trees that are so common to consecrated grounds; there,



in the shade, they enjoy a picnic luncheon of fancy biscuits, and strawberries with clotted cream spread upon a damask tablecloth. Just across the way, a leisurely game of croquet is played upon the uneven green; bumpy, from having been tilled and retilled with each mortal addition. The course, laid in and around the tombstones, has the unfortunate quality of frustrating the players' perceptions of angle and distance, and as the sun bends around a headstone, one can nearly see the outline of a man lining up his shot; squinting first one eye, and then the other, as if to reconcile the different images of an optical illusion. Once hit, the ball ricochets off the grey granite creating a small powder cloud in the air, and rolls briskly into the woods where it comes to rest, having reached the end of its reckless trajectory, amidst a sprawling patch of crocuses. I do not know if the retired tea merchant and biscuit entrepreneur, James Peek, selected the plot or whether he inherited it from some older family member who chose it long before James came to reside within its damp interior, but from the photograph, it appears that whomever selected the site chose a corner plot, flanked on two sides by forest and positioned so as to receive equal parts of sun and shade. Perhaps it is the quality of the image itself, or perhaps it is all the foliage surrounding the edifice or the moss that cleaves to its sides, but the photograph gives off a green light so that everything, even its white spaces,

appears to have been washed in a chlorophyll bath. One has the impression from this profusion of green that Nature has been left more or less to its own devices over the years, to nestle or to overtake the monument as it sees fit, and to be truthful, I cannot decide whether the grave is under siege or whether it is being embraced by the rampant growth. Cemeteries, I have often thought, are some of the greenest places on earth. And I have quietly speculated that this is so not only because the civilised world has been kept at bay, but because the soil has been rendered fecund by the bones and organs of the dead. Fed on the mineral rich remains of human corpses, graveyards have become abundant places of life. And if my thinking is correct, then there is, I feel, something unnecessarily selfish about the mausoleum as a resting place; for in keeping its contents above ground, entombed in impenetrable stone, the mausoleum prohibits the return of the dead to Nature, keeping them instead in a strange state of preservation as if the body might again be needed someday like an old suit that one keeps in the back of the closet, stuffed with moth balls, waiting for the chance to wear it once more. But in all likelihood, should that opportunity arise, we would find that the suit was more tattered than we thought, and that it no longer fit quite the way we remembered it to have once fit, and so perhaps it would have been better to have parted with it - generously, fearlessly - when it first outlived its purpose all those years ago. And so, if cemeteries are green places, it seems it is almost in spite of our efforts to preserve the dead in some suspended state, whether in mausoleums or by embalming or some other such treatment. Human creatures are the only creatures, at least to my knowledge, who are able to circumvent the inevitable processes of decay by withholding, in some manner, their corpses from the Earth, and for this accomplishment we should perhaps not be too proud, for in refusing to be part of the decaying mass, to joyously give oneself up to the worms, the moss, the fungi, the general rabble of decomposition, we have also refused to be part of the regeneration to which all decay is ultimately directed. Beneath the living lie the prostrate dead in every stage of decay, an ancestor of mine once wrote, - a mass of vegetable

matter returning to its original elements, and slowly giving back to the soil what it had gathered during the long period of its existence, in the form of fertilising gases and organic matter, again to act their parts in nourishing a new and rising generation. And though she was not speaking of the processes of decay and regeneration of the cemetery, but rather of those in the great chemical laboratory of the forest, as she called it, I do not believe she would have made a distinction. On the contrary, well-known for her documentation of plant life, Catherine Parr Traill's understanding of the natural world was a solace to her in those mournful times, of which there were many, when disease, murder, fire, and very rarely, old age, took the lives of friends and family. Her years of close observation of vegetation and creatures of all kinds and in all stages, no less her unshakeable faith in God, would have sufficiently buttressed her against the psychological and physical ravages of Grief, who was no stranger to her. It would have been, I imagine, an inestimable comfort to her to know that her loved ones were, as she too would be at the rather astounding age of ninety-seven in the year 1899, returned to the earth, fodder for new growth.



On the thirteenth of August, just less than a month after my discovery of the biscuit tin, I paid a visit to the cemetery in the village of Lakefield where the naturalist and writer, Catherine Parr Traill, née Strickland, is buried alongside many of her kin. In Traill's days, Lakefield was a small but industrious community populated by growing emigrant families who had settled on either side of the Otonabee river, an active commercial waterway. A sizeable native population then resided in the region and it was they who named the river, Otonabee, water running swiftly flashing brightly, a name both literal and poetic, and one which remains characteristic of the river to the present time. Today, Lakefield consists largely of an ageing population who, like the Otonabee, have retired from their busy working lives to enjoy the more tranquil pace of what is now, a quiet village with a single main street. That street, which runs parallel to the river and houses, among other things, the local grocery store, two massage clinics, a funeral home, and a church dating back to the 1800's, is named, in all the earnestness one might expect of the early pioneers, Water Street. The nomenclature of Lakefield's streets is not insignificant. During my walk around its streets, lanes, crescents, courts, and drives, I discovered, and later confirmed from my study of its map, that Lakefield's roads are, in descending numerical order, first, the namesakes of its settlers - Maria, Katherine, Grant, Fitzgerald, Moodie, Strickland, D'eyncourt, Reid, Parr, Tate, and Stewart, et cetera - then, of its cultural inheritance and ties to the mother country - King, Regent, Albert, Oxford, Nelson, Stanley, and Bishop - and, finally, of its aboriginal peoples - Kawartha and Chippewa. Rabbit Street may be included here, though I cannot say for certain. Discussing a different sort of naming, Traill noted the odd and, she felt, unmeaning tradition of naming plants after people. In *Claytonia Virginica*, Traill writes, some botanist has perpetuated his own insignificant name of Clayton, while the Indian mother, with a truer instinct, she continues, would never name a flower after her child, though she might name the child after the flower. In addition to Lakefield's more or less permanent senior population, there is a rather large influx of youth each academic year who attend

the private boarding school located at the easternmost end of the village, and who can be seen rowing the Otonabee in the fall and spring, or walking to town in their grey flannels for this or that odd item not available at the school store. Aside from these temporary citizens, and the seasonal contributions of campers whose trailers and tents cluster together on the western shore of the river each summer, there are few individuals below the age of sixty to be found. And so when one visits the village, one has the sense of entering a place that moves more slowly, more deliberately than most, so that, there, it might still be possible to notice such things as the declining population of monarchs, the purple pink hue of the coneflowers, or the thinning bark of the Birch. It was here in Lakefield in her final residence of Westove, that Catherine lived out her last years, modestly and happily, a poor country mouse, as she described herself in one of her many letters to her numerous relatives across the Dominion.

Catherine arrived in Canada in 1832, newly wed to officer Thomas Traill, a gentleman whose love of literature and languages had earned him a degree from Baliol College, Oxford. Well-educated as he was, and well-travelled, having toured the Continent, living for a time in Paris and Berlin, it is not surprising to find that Traill had made the acquaintance of some of the more well-known men of letters and of science of his day. Of the literary figures, it is probable that Traill met fellow Scotsman, Sir Walter Scott, whose son-in-law and biographer, John Lockhart, was one of Traill's closest friends. While it is unlikely that Traill knew Scott at all intimately given the difference in their ages - Scott died the year the Traills emigrated - the two men's lives have certain broad strokes in common. Both valued their Scottish heritage; both knew and respected Lockhart; both adored the written word; and rather more unfortunately, both men fell into financial ruin and poverty in their later years from the usual combination of unsound decisions and unpredictable events. But while Scott, with the kind of heroism he had previously reserved for his fictional characters, struggled to repay his creditors by writing at an accelerated rate, it was not Thomas, but Catherine who wielded the pen in order to

stave off the demon of Starvation that was never far distant. And like Scott, the role of author was one she was already well accustomed to, having sold her first collection of stories at the age of sixteen when the sudden death of another Thomas - Thomas Strickland, her beloved father - left Catherine and her family in much reduced circumstances. In the only portrait I have ever seen of Thomas Traill, he figures a serious and dignified man. A physiognomist might suggest that Traill was a man of no slight intellectual achievement; for his strongest feature is his immense brow which, smooth and unwrinkled, comprises a clear one third, if not one half of the total area of his perfectly oval head. There is a certain gauntness to Traill's visage, an impression likely encouraged by the fashion of his hair which, having receded well past his temples, grows down from the crown to the level of the upper lip in a solid mass, coating the sides of his scalp like moss on a rock. The slope of Thomas's shoulders seems severe by today's standards, but in their steep descent they suggest a man of privilege, which Traill was by birth if no longer by circumstance. The artist, whose name is not known, may well have perceived something delicate and gentle about Traill, and perhaps it was this perception as much as his desire to portray a man of wealth that led the painter to represent Traill's shoulders as inhospitable to the burdens of the world. Whatever the case, by the time of Thomas's marriage to Catherine on May 13th, 1832, the Traill family estate was already much encumbered by debt, and its fortunes, acquired by the harvesting of sea-kelp, were greatly diminished. The man whom Catherine married was, in truth, a half-pay officer with a small military pension, and few prospects for a man of his class. It is difficult to connect Traill's fine features and scholarly demeanour with the physically demanding work of bush clearing and homesteading, nor do I readily see him paddling the Otonabee in a canoe, tapping maple syrup, or laying fences. And indeed, Thomas was no great master of any of these. By all accounts, Traill was a hopeless farmer, a poor businessman, an unsuccessful petitioner of government posts, and a melancholic given to frequent bouts of depression as he endured a life that was fundamentally at odds with his

constitution and his habits. But we should perhaps refrain from judging Traill, whose failures and incapacities seem all the more damning when compared, as they always are, to his wife's seemingly endless optimism, faith and resourcefulness; History has made Thomas Traill, Catherine's foil, and against her brightness he appears ever dark. It is not impossible that Thomas's greatest, and perhaps his only flaw, was his failure to know himself. For had he been a better judge of his own character, had he studied his own image with a clear eye, he may well have noticed such features as the high brow, the fine cheekbones, and the lips, parted just enough to suggest a proclivity for refined conversation in any one of the five languages he had mastered. And had he done so, he may well have reached the conclusion - despite the tantalising lure of a new life in a new land, and despite the heady delusion that comes with new love and a young bride - the kind of giddiness that makes a man nine years her senior, a widower, and a father of two teenage sons feel his pulse quicken and his blood run hot - despite these considerations, Thomas may well have reached the conclusion that the settler's life was inhospitable to all that was within him. Catherine, I believe, understood this about Thomas even if History has not, and she would have explained Thomas's failure to thrive in Canada in much the same way she would have explained the inability of the pine to take root in sand, or of the house wrens to outlast the winter, or of the Indians to thrive under laws not of their own making. In the natural world, and there is nothing, she would have said, that falls outside of Nature, Catherine perceived an economy, managed by the Great Director, in which everything has its place and its purpose, where nothing is wasted nor lost and all is connected. Believing this to be so, she was appalled by the destruction she saw grow worse with the arrival of each new settler as trees were felled, water was dammed, and roads were built, and though she herself was part of that same colonial enterprise, she was acutely sensitive to the desolation it wrought. Only two decades after her arrival in Canada, Catherine tallied the losses in the articles and essays she composed for sale in the burgeoning periodicals market. The time is not far distant, Catherine writes of the forest

flowers, when many of these sweet children of the wilderness will be sought for in vain, those more especially that love the cool and shady recesses of the forest; that have their haunt by the mossy stone and bubbling rill; as the axe and the fire level the woods where they flourished, they disappear. Like the wild Indian, they fade away before the influence of civilisation, and the place that knew them once shall know them no more. Man has altered the face of nature. The forest and its dependents will soon be among the things that were.

Of the non-literary remnants that survive of Traill's life there is, on display in the Christ church museum on Water Street, a large wooden screw press. From my recollection it stands a half foot in width by one in length and one in height, extending to nearly two feet when completely unscrewed. Simple and effective, it was designed to compress its contents without undue effort on the part of the operator, and when I think of it now, I cannot help but associate it with certain types of medieval torture instruments that I have seen on occasion at various European museums; tools once used to inflict unspeakable damage on their victims of whom we have no record. It was with this basic technology that Catherine spent many hours compressing the flowers and ferns and grasses that she had collected in her wicker gathering basket during her rambles along the plains and through the forest. Once pressed, Traill would assemble hand bound collections for sale or for gifts, as the purse would allow. One of these, a diverse collection of pressed mosses and ferns, found its way to England where it came to reside in the home of Lady Charlotte Greville who took great pleasure in exhibiting the handsome collection of New World vegetation to her afternoon visitors over biscuits and tea. It was Lady Charlotte who won for Catherine, by her influence with Lords and Ladies, a grant of one hundred pounds - with which Catherine purchased her last home - and the gift of a new screw press. It is quite likely that the press on display in the Christ Church Museum is the one sent by Lady Charlotte, for it is a model far superior to that which Traill ever would have purchased for herself. In her later years, it was Traill's

habit to place the press upon her writing desk. The desk, which is almost the height of a child's, is low enough to have given her the leverage she needed to turn the screw almost effortlessly, engaging her upper body rather than her lamentable hands which arthritis had made as knotty and gnarled as the exposed roots of an ancient tree. On sunny days, the late morning light poured in through the north-east window illuminating the desktop



and the specimen upon it so that her liquidy eyes, no longer the clear blue pools of her youth, could make out even the finest of veins. Then, she would lean her aged body, which having already begun its slow return to the earth was hunched and bent, over the desk, placing the specimen before her between a folded piece of parchment. In this posture of intense concentration, hovering over her desk and clothed in her usual black dress with bonnet, Catherine resembled a large black beetle frozen in a moment of contemplation that only the beetle can explain. Having placed the parchment between the wooden leaves of the press, and with gravity in her favour, all was ready for the slow turn of the screw from which would emerge a very different creature than the one that once had been. And looking out the window, directly into the light and into the leaves of the magnolia that brushed the side of the house, she would turn blindly, evenly and slowly, sensing for the point at which to stop; the point beyond which the plant would bruise and bleed, and her fingers would be stained with its pigment; not beauty, but a damp pulpy mess. The subtleties of force, the gradations of compression, are fine distinctions that

can be made only by employing all of one's senses, she would say, and it was this capacity to devote her attention wholly to the subject no less her particular talent for hearing their vegetal voices, that ensured her pressings were exceptional nearly every time. In reading Catherine's sketches and studies on plant life, there is, behind her expressions of sheer wonder and joy at the natural world, a very attentive eye to the physical details of the plant. And though a plaque positioned outside Westove refers to her as a gifted botanist, she would have disputed the title for all of its pretensions to a science she felt was too exclusive, in and of itself, to be of sufficient use. While Science unfolds to us her lifted page, the simpler branches of knowledge need not be disregarded. Merely to load our memories with the learned names of trees, and plants, and flowers, is after all but a barren and unsatisfactory acquisition; which, while it adds little in reality to our store of practical knowledge, is apt to make us pedantic, Catherine wrote in *Floral Sketches No. 1. The Violet*. For her sense of the importance of the natural world, Catherine owed much to her upbringing near the East Anglian coast, in Suffolk, to which the family retired when Catherine was still a baby, in hopes that country life would ameliorate Thomas Strickland's rather severe gout. The coast is, of course, both the same and different as the one which W.G. Sebald documents in *The Rings of Saturn*, a record of his walking tour there in the late 1990's. Comparing their respective experiences of the region, one is struck by the tremendous, though not wholly surprising, gulf between them, which is no more and no less than that of time itself. For while Sebald relates the decay and ruination he sees throughout - the propellerless windmills, the dilapidated seaside resort, the treeless copse, the abandoned monastery - fragments of other ages, broken and partial as they are, Traill creates a picture of one of those ages, seemingly healthy and robust and strangely eternal, as if it might go on forever even as it crumbles around her. Details of Catherine's early life in Suffolk surface with a vividness that is not uncommon to recollections of childhood, and each time I read Traill's memoirs, I am reminded of Wordsworth's long poem, *The Prelude*, which takes the power of such early

memories, these spots of time, as one of its main interests. And like Wordsworth's recollections of catching woodcocks among the scattered yew-trees and the crags, or of the huge cliff that like a living thing / Strode after me, Catherine relates her memories of this sort with the clarity and feeling of one who lives the moment with each telling, and who finds in them a fructifying virtue. The roads were deep in snow, she recalls of her journey to the family's new home, Reydon Hall, one bitter Christmas Eve in 1808, and we children were sent over in an open tax-cart with the servants and carpenters. The moon was gloriously round and full in the winter sky, and its light brightened our way even through the darkness of the forest bits, which were very dark indeed. It was so cold, they rolled me up in a velvet pelisse belonging to Eliza to keep me from freezing, but I was as merry as a cricket all the way, and kept them laughing over my childish sallies. We stopped at a place called Deadman's Grave to have some straw put into the bottom of the cart to keep us warm. Susanna's fingers were stiff with cold, and I warmed them between the folds of my cloak and explained that if she imagined her hands placed flat upon the moon, they would warm instantly as if before a night fire. The trees that lined the road, were heavily laden with snow and had bent over the roadway creating an uneven canopy above our woolly heads. When I raised my chin to the stars and looked up, the sky travelled briskly past me, and under the diffuse and enchanting light of the moon it appeared to me that the very trees were dancing; their icicle hair and snowy arms waving to the jingle of the horses' bells and the rolling laughter of our small party. No, I shall never forget that journey to Reydon through the snow. Of the two homes in which Catherine spent her early years - the first, Stowe house, near Bungay along the banks of the Waveney river valley, and the second, Reydon Hall, not three miles from the coastal town of Southwold - it is impossible to say which had the greater effect on shaping her into the woman she was to become. For though she credits her happiest days to the former - to being embraced, she writes, by the pastoral beauty of that loveliest of lovely valleys, the Waveney - it was at Reydon where Catherine began to read voraciously and

write stories. Reydon Hall, an Elizabethan manor dating back to the sixteenth century remains standing today, and though it has changed since the days in which the Stricklands inhabited it, having endured the structural whims of various owners over time, it remains a distinguished country seat.



From the two sketches I have seen that represent the building during the time in which the Stricklands resided there, it is clearly the curvaceous Dutch gables - the shape of which has always made me think of mantel clocks and headstones - that give the home its stately elegance, for without them there is really no other ornamental feature, aside from the mullioned windows, that can be said to be at all exceptional. One might include in this category of 'things that came with the house', the handful of unladen spirits that were said to roam its more desolate places, especially the third floor garret; but it is said that these entities are all about us all the time anyway, and so certainly not exceptional in a house as old as Reydon where, one would imagine, they would have much pleasure in congregating. Too, there were, in the Stricklands' day, the sprawling grounds in which the children spent many hours, each cultivating their own garden and observing the marvels of the natural world as part of the education their parents largely attended to themselves. Thomas, who had chosen Catherine as his favourite from among his six daughters and two sons, often walked the grounds with her, pointing out this lily or that

ladybug to 'Katie,' whose presence, he said, soothed the gout that had deprived him of the use of his right hand. I have never been able to connect Catherine's descriptions of Reydon's sylvan wilderness - which, in any case, may only have existed in her imagination - with the nearly naked landscape upon which Reydon sits in the two available sketches of it, both black and white. In my mind, Catherine's Reydon is far better represented by Gustav Klimt's painting of Kammer Castle by the Attersee II which, notwithstanding the architectural differences, embodies the spirit of the Reydon that Catherine recalls. In Klimt's painting, it appears as if the house had grown from the ground, pushing its way up through the forest trees which emerge in thick green tufts between the house's divisions. Klimt's castle is alive, not merely because it is surrounded by living things, but because it breathes with its landscape; should one, for example, stare at the painting, unfocussing one's eyes by squinting slightly, one will notice that the roof of the structure disappears into the dark sky as if it were made of the same amorphous substance as the air itself. It is perhaps the ratio of natural to man-made elements in the painting that accounts for its overwhelmingly organic effect, for if one looks only at the shapes and colours, it becomes clear that the house, painted in white, yellow, and black is confined to the top right corner of the painting, and even then accounts for only a portion of that area. Everything else is greenery. There was much then, between the architecture and landscape of Reydon alone, to keep the Strickland childrens' imaginations busy, but it was the library within the manor, to which the children had unrestricted access, that refined their higher minds. Thomas had, by his first wife who died shortly after their marriage, inherited a rather fine library which she, in turn, had inherited from her great uncle, Isaac Newton. And so it was that the children learned their fundamentals from the astronomer's personal selection of folios, chronicles, and tomes; and from Newton's own writings they learned the scientific truth that heavy bodies always fall to earth no matter at what height they stand; a fact which was to prepare them for the hardship that was to come. The Stricklands were, for a short time,

among the wealthy families of Southwold, and so they remained until the failure of Thomas's investments forced the family into leaner times. By Catherine's sixteenth birthday, Thomas Strickland had died of complications from his gout which had been aggravated by the severity of his material losses, and the family was left to fend for itself in a condition of genteel poverty.

It is impossible to say whether, without the strain of financial hardship upon them, five of the six Strickland sisters would have ever become the writers they did, but what is certain is that writing was one of the few avenues by which women of the educated middle class could earn an income. And so, like the Bronte sisters to whom Catherine always found much in their upbringing that compared with her own, Elizabeth, Agnes, Jane Margaret, Catherine, and Susanna all embarked on successful literary careers, while Sarah, the sole non-literary sister, gained a reputation for both her beauty and her superlative baking skills. Perhaps, it is no coincidence then, that of all the sisters, Sarah was the only one to have married twice. In the backwoods there were times when it was no small hardship for Catherine to be so distant from her home and the company of her elder sisters, and it was during these moments that she especially longed for the sweet smells of Sarah's delectable loaves and cakes and biscuits. Over the years, Sarah was unfailingly generous when it came to sharing the fruits of her labours with Catherine in the only way she could. I send you these receipts dear sister, in lieu of the genuine articles, Sarah wrote. For an instant I was overtaken by the notion that I might send a few dozen directly, but when I imagined the mouldy and crumbled state in which they would find you, I came to my senses and chose the wiser course. I find the Abernethys crispy and quite fine. If baked twice, they will keep for some weeks - even in the damp Southwold air of which you were so fond. Towards the end of their lives, it would have been possible for Sarah to ship Catherine her biscuits in one of the decorated biscuit tins which began appearing as early as 1868 in England. But we have no evidence that Sarah, who in that year would have been seventy, her baking years largely behind her, ever sent

Catherine a batch of her Abernethy biscuits or any other baked good for that matter. Still, the human mind is such that despite the lack of evidence, I have a clear image of Catherine receiving such a parcel from Sarah, and this image bears an uncanny resemblance to one of the postcards, dated 1908, nine years after Catherine's death, which the Peek Frean biscuit company sent out to entice would-be biscuit buyers. In 1907, the Peek Frean biscuit company's directors shared Sarah's vain hope of sending biscuits through the post, and so with a new phase of biscuit consumption in view, the company began sending a series of postcards, redeemable for a free sample of biscuits, to homes all across England. Far from being random, the addresses of these homes had been turned over by the local shopkeepers to the promotions department of the biscuit company which, by then, had discovered that an aggressive advertising campaign was the key to having biscuits in the pantries of every home, ready for consumption morning, noon, and night. With a flare for the dramatic, the biscuit company staged its promotion in three acts, an illustrated postcard for each, over the course of three weeks: Act I: A mysterious parcel arrives at the doorstep; Act II: What could it be? Biscuits?; and finally, Act III: Why yes, it is Biscuits! Biscuits in a Tin! What a Delight!. And it was in this fashion, and others like it, that the Peek Frean Biscuit company eventually became one of the largest biscuit suppliers in the world, exporting to Australia, Buenos Aires, Alexandria, India, and Canada, having created the very need they were in the business of fulfilling.



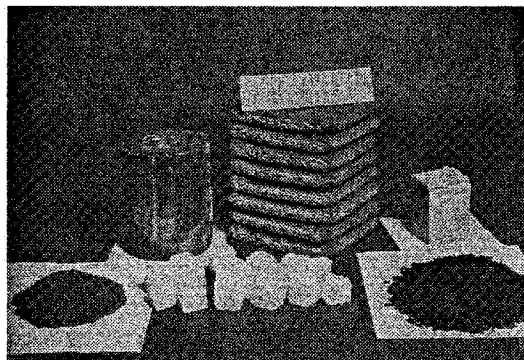
The word 'biscuit' is derived from the Latin, *bis* 'twice' and *coctus* 'cook', meaning twice cooked, which is exactly the process by which biscuits were originally made. By baking biscuits and slices of bread twice, bakers were able to lower the moisture content of the baked good to as low as two percent, and in so doing were able to produce a hard, dry biscuit that remained edible for long periods of time. This was especially important in the sixteenth century when biscuits became a staple for sailors on sea voyages; sea biscuits, hard tack, sea cake - all described the desiccated baked goods that sailors abhorred just slightly less than they depended upon them for their sustenance. It is said that at mealtimes at sea, one could hear, amidst the rush of wind on sails and water under the keel, the percussive beats of the seamen tapping their biscuits against their bowls to shake the maggots from them before the first bite, and perhaps this is why the word 'grub' has been used colloquially to denote food to the present day. It was not until the eighteenth century, largely due to the urgings of Admiral Nelson and Captain Cook each of whom consumed the biscuits along with their crews, that the problem of weevils and maggots and all manner of infestations was solved by the introduction of wooden storage crates lined with tin, which had the additional advantage of keeping the biscuits dry during long voyages at sea. From these utility size containers it was but a leap of a century to the small uniquely decorated metal boxes, the *boites de fantaisie* as they were known on the Continent, in which were stored a more refined and much improved biscuit; one that had been baked for the domestic palette rather than for those of scurvy-ridden sailors and rugged adventurers. Among the latter order of biscuit eaters, we may count the crew of the *Terra Nova* and the expedition team it carried of 33 men, 19 ponies, and 34 dogs to the continent of Antarctica in 1910, where the team remained until its return with 28 men, no ponies, and 13 dogs in 1913. The expedition was the second of its kind under the leadership of Captain Robert Falcon Scott who, having already experienced the extreme conditions of the continent on his first voyage there in 1901-1904, knew well the importance of provisions. Among the many firms selected to

supply the expedition with its goods was Huntley & Palmers Biscuits which in 1921 would merge with its prime competitor, Peek Frean. From the biscuit company, the expedition received their ship's biscuits, which one presumes had improved in flavour since the days of Captain Cook; their sledging biscuits, which formed a key part of their rations on the journey to the South Pole, and were made especially for the expedition according to a formula specified by Scott; and their fancy biscuits which as the name suggests, were of an entirely different category than those that were depended upon to sustain life amidst the glaciers and ice bergs of the continent. These were the kind that, along with three hundredweight of fancy chocolates and crystallised fruits, sweets, and ginger, were essential to uplifting the party's spirits in a continent that Captain Cook, who had no fancy biscuits to colour his vision, described in 1775 as Lands doomed by nature to everlasting frigidness and never once to feel the warmth of the Sun's rays, whose horrible and savage aspect I have no words to describe. Though the Antarctic was better known in Scott's day than in Cook's, having been partially charted inland, Cook's description of a frozen and foreboding land was as apt in 1910 as it was in 1775 notwithstanding the advances of science and technology that had occurred in the interim. For Scott and his four South Polar expedition members, Wilson, Oates, Bowers, and Evans, these were an insufficient defence against the unpredictable weather conditions they encountered on their outward journey from the Pole, from which none of the men returned. Their end is documented to the very last in Scott's journals which were recovered when a search party located the starved and frozen bodies of Scott, Wilson, and Bowers in their tent, only eleven miles south of One Ton Depot where a cache of food and fuel was stored in anticipation of their arrival there. If we know anything of the experiences of the expedition, from the point at which it parted from its last support team to sledge the final one hundred and fifty miles of the eight hundred mile journey to the Pole and back again, it is owing to Scott's recovered journals. Without them, we would not know of the crushing defeat of discovering a few miles from their destination, the

black flag marker of the Norwegian explorer, Amundsen, which confirmed they had been preceded to the Pole; nor of the heavy march outward, labouring into the wind with cold feet and hands, without the elation of priority to spur them on, and already the seed of a doubt - I wonder if we can do it, Scott writes; nor of the slow drags of the sledge over the irregular sastrugi surface and of the pain measured in degrees of winter: -30° , force 6



winds, 89° parallel; of Evans' blistered fingers and his nose, white and hard, both from frostbite, and Oates' damnably cold feet; of finding the inward journey's cairns and sledge tracks, and of losing them, and the joy of finding them again; of sleeping bags, getting wetter and wetter. Forty pounds - their weight in ice. At five bags, they pulled 200 pounds of cold comfort; of getting thinner, and talking about food a good deal more;



of a stint of fine marches with helpful wind, clear track, and fair weather. This is the

bright side, Scott writes, the reverse of the medal is serious; of Wilson's eyes, snow-blind in spite of amber glasses and tortured by the pain. Yet still making sketches of the monochromatic landscape; of temperatures twenty degrees lower than on the inward journey, and the wind, a knife cutting up their faces; of the panic that comes with Bowers' discovery that the party is a biscuit-box short. The shortage, which no one can explain, is a full day's allowance; of two unexpected falls - the first, Scott and Evans in a crevasse, and later, Evans again. Of Evans, Scott had written: A giant worker with a really remarkable headpiece. By the time the party reaches the foot of the Beardmore glacier, thirteen days later, Evans has slipped into a coma, and dies from injuries sustained to his head in the fall; of reaching Mount Darwin having endured forty-eight days of plateau conditions. Nearly seven weeks of incessant wind to and from the Pole now behind them, the word 'survival' has come to take on new meaning; of geologising in the moraine under Mount Buckley, where Wilson, head of the scientific team, collects plant impressions from the coal seams and makes the rare find of an archeo-cyathus in limestone. Like lizards, they sun themselves on the rocks. For fourteen weeks they have trod only on snow; of getting stuck in a maze of ice crevasses and fissures from which it seems impossible to escape; of praying for fine weather that does not come; of one biscuit and tea for breakfast. In future, writes Scott, food must be worked so that we do not run so short if the weather fails us. We mustn't get into a hole like this again; of coming off the glacier to the reward of a stew of pemmican and horseflesh, now shared among only four men - the best hoosh of the journey. The new life that a full measure of food brings; of the lateness of the season and the slow progress on a surface that has the glide of desert sand, which is to say, none at all; of Scott's realisation - Everything now depends on the weather; of reaching South Barrier Depot to find all stores in order, save for a shortage of oil. It is later hypothesised that the oil, a supply of which had been left for the party, evaporated from constant exposure to the sun, and from the disintegration of the tin's leather stopper in the extreme cold. With the season rapidly closing, the

shortage is fatal; of temperatures dropping to - 40° with no wind to hoist a sail on the

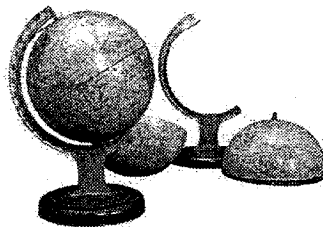


sledge, and so, no relief from miles of heavy dragging; of Oates and Bowers who dress their feet in their last new pair of finnesko, laced with a prayer; of three misfortunes, one atop another - a second shortage of oil at Middle Barrier Depot; Oates discloses severely frost-bitten feet; and the wind that had been wished for arrives, but with it comes colder temperatures. This, and terrible surfaces make extra marching impossible; of things getting blacker; of the hope against hope that the dog team has visited the next depot with provisions and of the gravest doubts that they have; of shortages all around; of disbelief at the temperatures, the winds, and the blizzards. Truly awful outside the tent, Scott



writes. Must fight it out to the last biscuit, but can't reduce rations. By Middle Barrier Depot, it is the beginning of the end for the party; although who is to say that the beginning was not in fact much earlier. Perhaps as early as April 13, 1911, when Scott writes of the fear that misfortune was in the air, and of the profound distrust with which I

had been forced to regard our mysterious Antarctic climate. Then, terrible weather conditions had prevented the depot-laying team from laying one ton of provisions for the upcoming Polar march at the 80° parallel. Instead, the One Ton depot had been laid further north at latitude 79° 29'S - just out of reach of the exhausted Polar party who, on March 15th, 1912 arrive at the 80° parallel. The following day, Titus Oates, his feet now wretched and festering, swollen with puss and leaking fluid, a hindrance to the party who would not forsake him, leaves the tent in a blizzard to meet his end. I am going outside, he says, and may be some time. Or perhaps the beginning was as early as September 13, 1909, when Scott publicly announces the expedition and begins his immense campaign for funds. Unlike its predecessor, the expedition is not a national project, and so Scott is forced to solicit donations from private citizens and businesses. Among donors, it is the proposed conquest of the South Pole in the name of the British Empire, over and above the ambitious aims of the scientific programme, that brings in the largest amounts of money. Or perhaps the beginning of the end was even as early as Scott's first glance at the continent on a globe, when his purple-blue child eyes found the circle hidden at the bottom of the earth, and pointing to it, he said, I will go here; I will go here.



III

At the back of my house, or rather the house in which I have rented a flat on the second floor for some years now, runs an alley wide enough to be a road in itself. It is along this alley that the residents of the neighbourhood stack their garbage every Monday and Thursday and, more often than not, on any other day which suits them. In addition to the regular black or green plastic garbage bags that line the roadside, bags filled with all the mundane and unsavoury waste of our daily lives - the brown lettuce, raggedly chewed chicken bones, soiled tissues, ripped receipts, tin foil encrusted with drippings, mouldy cheese in plastic wrap, fish skin and scales, knotted birthday ribbon, batteries, disposable diapers which will never disintegrate - there are, usually at some respectable distance from these piles, small islands of other things that have also been discarded, but are not intended for the steel jaws of the crushing truck. Whether the former owners of these items hoped that someone else could make use of that which they could not, or whether they had not the heart to truly say goodbye to all those old things they had lived with over time, or whether they had moved and had to purge their belongings, I really cannot say what intention, if any, is behind the various mounds of goods that dot the alley, here and there, at any given time. But so reliable is the flow of discarded objects that a sort of informal economy of goods has emerged. There is one man, for example, who makes his living collecting, repairing and otherwise refashioning his finds, which he then displays and sells each weekend at one end of the alley to the same general population who tossed the goods in the first place. It is not unheard of then, that people have purchased the very item they had once thrown out, seeing in it some new value that his care and attention had helped to bring to light. There is too, a neighbour friend of mine who has furnished her entire dwelling with the furniture, rugs, lamps, and art objects she has found in the alley, and who, when she tires of a piece, simply tosses it out and exchanges it for another. In this way, in all the years that I have lived in the quarter, I have seen her apartment

undergo at least seven incarnations, as if it were some restless soul in search of the right body. Another acquaintance, has painted his back porch and fence every other year for the last twelve years from the remains of discarded paint cans; it is the unpredictability of the colours, he claims, which inspire him to create the strange murals he paints around his small perimeter. I too have benefited from the gifts the alley has had to offer, mostly in the way of various books that I may never have purchased, but find irresistible once they appear in my path; as if, I convince myself, Destiny had brought them to me with some kernel of wisdom absolutely essential to my future success; also, a silver plated teapot and tray; a wooden ladder shaped in an A-frame, which must have been made for some specific purpose though I do not know what that may have been; and various large planks of wood from which I have made a number of shelves as well as two cat houses which serve as shelters for a handful of the alley's relentless population of vagrant cats. In return, I have given four matching wooden chairs, a tea table with wheels, a drying rack, a television antennae, and a kettle which leaked slightly around the cord and to which I attached a warning note.

One Sunday, only weeks after winter had retreated and spring had made its first appearance, tentative and cautious like one who is uncertain whether or not to stay for any length of time, I was returning home through the alley from having viewed an exhibit of Japanese woodblock prints at one of the small, private galleries in the city. The prints, all of which were country landscapes dated between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries, had so captivated me that I now seemed to notice everything about me in a state of vision that could only be called painterly. The way the roofs of the houses jutted out unevenly against the sky, which was empty and grey except for the electrical wires and telephone cables that ran across it at intervals, and the way the alley road extended far off into the distance, growing narrower and narrower, and finally dissolving completely, seemed contrived by some master hand, and I imagined that I could almost see the landscape as a painter might have seen it, complete with myself or how I

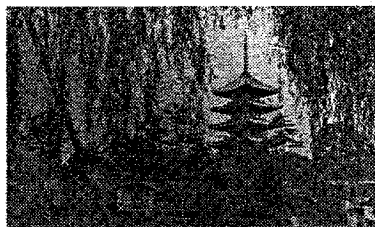
imagined myself to appear in it, a lone pedestrian walking the long road towards home just before sunset. Just across from my house, there is an apple tree which, planted near the side of the road and between two properties, does not seem to belong to anyone and has been left to nature over the years, to thrive or to wither as it may. Every spring, the apple tree has budded and bloomed the most beautiful white flowers which fall from its branches like snowflakes whenever a strong wind blows. Later, when the buds have taken, and the flowers have disappeared, hard round apples form, and ripen, and fall with solid thuds to the concrete below. No one that I know of has ever tried to eat one of these green fruits, tinged with red, and about the size of plums, and though I have often wondered if some jam or relish might be made from the harvest, I have never made any effort to collect the fallen fruits. Other than the grey squirrels that cluck vigorously at each other amidst the trees, I have seen birds, mostly crows, picking at the apples which, having spoiled in the sun, have become soft enough to be scavenged, and I have also seen various neighbourhood children gather the fruit to throw at their friends as if it were snowballs. That no humans have ever tasted the apples likely has something to do with the waste that is frequently dumped at the tree's base or has blown there over time, having wrapped itself around the trunk; or with the numerous dogs that have marked their territory there; or with the now defunct chicken restaurant that was known to dump its barrels of fat and deep-fry oil at the tree's base when the barrels became too full to lift onto the disposal truck. As I approached the apple tree that day in the lane, I noticed a large open cardboard box just under it, the four flaps of its lid rising and falling with the slight breeze that was blowing. It was full to overflowing with objects I could not then make out. At about the same time, I saw Marta Françoise making her way from her back door towards the tree with a broken chair in her arms. Marta, who must have been in her seventies, was well known for practising some form of yogic exercise on her rooftop at sunrise and sunset in spring, summer, and fall, weather permitting. In my mind, this limber woman with long grey hair that rested on the rise of her buttocks was a kind of

mythical figure, a weather goddess of some sort, for when Marta did not appear on her rooftop, it was certain that the day would not be fine; and in the winter months, Marta would disappear indoors not to be seen again until most of the ice had melted in spring. Setting her three-legged chair under the tree, and placing the cardboard box on top of it, Marta looked up and we greeted each other for the first time since her winter hibernation. Until the age of fifty, Marta said when I asked about the box, I kept everything that I acquired; every letter, photograph, piece of clothing, gift, jewel -- every object that came to me, I accumulated, certain that I needed each and every article, and fearful that if one thing should go missing, I would be at some debilitating loss. And then, one day, I awoke from an unusually long night's rest and knew that if I had spent the first fifty years of my life acquiring, I would now spend the next fifty years disposing of my things, in one way or another, until all I had left were the clothes in which I would be buried. Have a look, and see if anything suits you, Marta said, gesturing with her head towards the apple tree. I went to the box, and for some reason which is not clear to me, I felt a tremor of apprehension as if the act of looking would commit me to some object that might consume me, or perhaps as if I expected some creature to jump out, latch itself around my throat, and pull me into the box where I would disappear for some time. I do not know what I thought I might find there, nor why it should have affected me so, except that I recall thinking in that moment just before peering in, of my small collection of odd things; and I wonder now if my apprehension might not have been a fear of what histories lay in that box, clinging to objects like dust on a damp rag. Or perhaps it was not so much fear, as hesitation to return once again to the labyrinth of the past; as if a step in that direction of time, were as uncertain and unpredictable as one into the future. The box was full of mostly small fragile things such as those a child might take great pleasure in were their little hands allowed to touch them - stained glass pieces, china figurines, et cetera - various tiny objects one might find scattered around a house in small nooks and tight spaces, on spice racks, oven ledges, or window and door frames. Beneath these

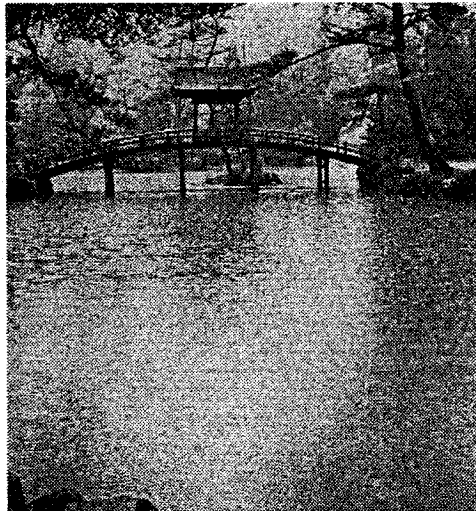
little things, I was amazed to find a large Japanese black lacquer jewellery box with a country scene painted on each of its sides and its lid. I could not prevent myself from gasping a little as I lifted it out of the box, in awe of the coincidence that I should find this object on the very day when I had spent the greater part of the afternoon viewing prints of the same nature. My father gave that box to me when I was a very young child, maybe five or six years old, Marta said, and inside it, I would keep my collection of special things which varied from day to day according to whatever caught my eye. Once, my mother found my pet mouse, Esmond, trapped inside, very nearly dead from fear and dehydration. It had not occurred to me, that he would not like to lie inside the box on its blue velvet lining, nestled next to the music cylinder. And so it was fortunate that my mother had heard the frantic scraping of his little nails on the wood, and traced the sound to my treasure box, whereupon lifting the lid she was very nearly ill at the sight of Esmond, his miniature ribcage heaving with each breath and his pink eyes wild and crazed. She took him then between her hands, and fed him sugar water from a lettuce leaf, and after he had drank and his breathing slowed, she lay him in his house of cedar chips and covered him with paper towelling to keep him warm, and then turned to me and said, not all special things are jewels for your box Marta; and that was all she said. After that, I kept the box empty for some time, too unsure to chance which things might die if placed inside, and to this day, I rarely close the lid of my jewellery box. A car drove by just then, and in its wake some leaves and bits of paper swirled around near our feet. Marta came and stood close beside me, and we both looked at the box for some time before she continued. My father purchased it in the Tokyo airport just before boarding his flight home. He was an engineer, and had gone to Japan to exchange ideas on some project or another, and had promised as he always did when he went away on business, to bring me home a gift of some sort. Often he would bring me a bar of soap from the hotel, or one of its pocket-sized sewing kits or felt shoeshine gloves, but on this voyage, he brought me back this box, saying that he had chosen it because he wanted to show me a

picture of where he had been while he was away. I remember waiting an eternity for him to unpack all of his luggage, for no gifts were ever given, whether to my mother or to myself, until after he had completely unpacked all of these things, as if he had never left. We would have to wait, full of anticipation, as he hung his ties and suit, tossed his handkerchiefs, socks, and underclothes down the laundry shoot, and emptied his toiletries from his travel case; and when finally, he climbed the cellar staircase with no suitcase in his hands, we knew he had returned it, full of mothballs, to its place on the utility shelf where it would remain until the next voyage. Sometimes, he would tease us, by moving in slow motion as if he were a character in a film playing at the wrong speed, and then I would pretend to turn the crank of the imaginary camera faster and faster until he sped up, as if I were the director of the scene in which he was playing. Little did I understand then, the ways in which I was a director of their lives, for it seems clear to me now, fully grown, and they long since dead, that the speed at which they lived had much to do with pleasing me. My parents, you see, wanted me to live in a world without hatred and fear and war, and even though the time we lived in was against them, they worked for these things. I was not spoiled, I did not live in grandeur, and yet so long as they lived, I wanted for nothing. Both were shot and killed by the SS one night, when they were caught trying to help members of the resistance escape from France. I knew from the beginning that my parents were revolutionaries, for I accompanied them to many of their secret meetings and rendezvous, and I guess in my own way, I played a part in the struggle against the Nazi occupation, for it was the presence of a child, sweetly dressed in a red beret and matching coat, walking hand-in-hand with her mother, that threw much suspicion off of our trail. And so, often we would meet our contacts in the most public of places - the park, the school yard, the market, the beauty parlour - to exchange important messages and news. After they died, I went to live out the rest of the war with my aunt and uncle on their farm in Toulouse, and my revolutionary days came to an early end. It is strange to me, to stand here now, thousands of miles away from Europe, and all those

years distant from my childhood, contemplating an object from before that time, before the war, before the death of my parents. And I feel in returning to it now, as if I could go back to that moment and live from that point a different life, as if I could cut away the time that followed and replace it with some alternate course of events. And maybe this is exactly what I will find in the next life, and the one after that, and so on, if such after lives exist at all; maybe I will find that one's lives are simply alternate paths that branch out in various directions like the roots of that apple tree, from some random point in time and space such as the day my father brought me that jewellery box. We shall have to see, I suppose. When father finally gave me my gift, I remember that he stood beside me, just as we are standing now, and after I had looked at its scenery for some time, he told me that all of Japan was on this box. At the time, I did not really understand what he had meant by this extraordinary claim, except that I had just been read the story of Pandora's box not long before and so, somewhere in my mind, the notion that all of a place could be contained on a box was not wholly unbelievable to me. When I look at it now, it is clear to me that what he was referring to was how the box is an amalgamation, a sort of allegory, if you will, of so many of the images and scenes that one identifies with Japan, even though one may never have been there, nor practically speaking, know anything about the place. I remember him pointing, with his long index finger, his nails always impeccably groomed, to each feature in turn as if he were giving me a guided tour. He took me first to Fuji-no-yama, the snow-capped mountain in the centre of the lid, and he told me then of the scores of pilgrims who climbed it each year to receive a blessing from the priest who lived at the top of this sacred place. Then we went east to the five-storied pagoda at Nara, standing tall and upright amidst crooked pines and rounded boulders, and



he explained how each tier represented one of the five elements - fire, air, earth, water, ether - to which we will be returned when we die. And just beneath the pagoda, he showed me the river stream in which the sampans glide under the moonlight, their triangular sails puffed in the breeze and their oars pulling the gently moving water. At water's edge, he paused long enough to point to the rock azaleas in bloom, and the beach stones polished smooth by the lapping current, and the dense cryptomeria grove in the distance. He then escorted me, as it were, over the arched bridge like those the impressionist painter, Claude Monet designed for his Giverny home, and told me how when one stands on the bank, the reflection of the bridge in the water below makes it



appear as if it were a perfect circle that one could travel all the way around like Esmond on his treadmill. On the other side of the bridge he showed me the thatched roofed tea house, where he said one could sit for hours drinking a single cup of green tea from a simple ceramic bowl listening to the creaking cicadas and the wind in the pines and the water bubbling in the kettle. And he suggested then, as he opened the lid to show me the Japanese woman painted there, dressed in a kimono and wooden slippers, her hair piled high and held in place with long tortoise shell combs, that she might be on her way to meet her friends at the iris gardens where they would write and sing poems. At the time, Marta continued, turning to meet my eyes, a slight smile forming on her lips, I was so lost

in his travel story, in all the smells and sounds and sights that he conjured from the box, that I did not notice, nor do I suppose it would have much mattered to me at that age, the shoddy way in which the box had been made. And indeed it was not until I had grown much older and had studied more of the Japanese arts, that I fully appreciated the box's deficiencies. The lacquerwork is false; it is nothing more than a single, perhaps a double layer of shiny black enamel paint on cheap wood, rather than the careful layers and layers of paint applied over time. And though the design of the box with its rectangular shape, feet, and slightly convex lid is authentic enough, the lid does not close as tightly as it should for the hinges have been unevenly placed and set too deeply. The mother of pearl border on the lid, which my father had described to me as the cobblestone path encircling the gardens, is rough and dull and has been glued onto the surface rather than inlaid as a finer work would have had it, and so over the years, it has chipped off in places, here and there. The keyhole, with its pattern on tin of a bird's tail feathers, spread wide with a waft of breeze above, has been designed so as to resemble the tsuba or hand guard of swords; and yet a finer keyhole would have been crafted of precious metals, its detail so acute as to be able to see the pattern of each feather in each plume. The box is a poor imitation, Marta continued, of highly skilled Japanese craftsmanship; it is all of the trappings but none of the substance. It is, in short, an inadequate copy that has been fashioned for the undiscerning, or thought-to-be-so, eyes of tourists who are looking, as my father did, for all of Japan in a single souvenir. These are the goods which are earmarked for export, mass manufactured, and sold in airport shops stocked full of colourful fans and kimonos, chopsticks and rice bowls, and porcelain tea sets - all made especially for those who have come to visit for a short time and wish to remember their trip forever. But what Japan is it, I wonder, that they are remembering in these parodies of fine things? For that matter, what do any of our memories really remember when we visit them time and time again? Each time I hold this jewellery box, it is not Japan, of course, but rather my father, the time he was away, the collections I placed inside it, my

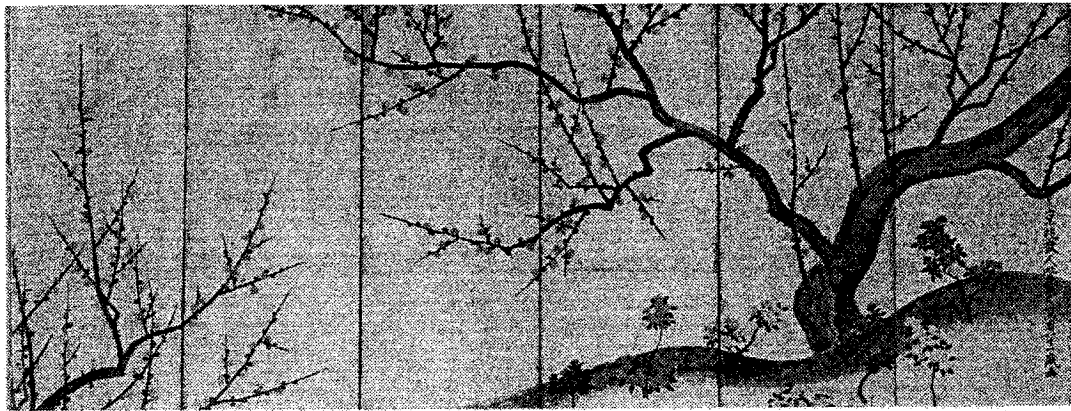
little Esmond, and the way as a young girl, after my parents died, I would stare at it for long periods at a time - it is these things that I remember each time I hold the box. And so, leaving it here, under the apple tree, is to close a porthole to those memories, to that particular cluster of reminiscences that only the box can lead me to. I do not regret parting with my things. It is all about me anyway - all this time, collecting around me like the waste that comes and goes in this lane, and so each year I return some time laden things to the ether, becoming a little lighter, a little less encumbered for having done so. Take it if you like, said Marta. She squeezed my shoulder then, and left me beside the apple tree with the box in my hands. I watched her walk towards her house, her long grey hair floating out behind her, until she went inside, and closed the door without once looking back. I stood alone in the alley for a moment more before I too turned and stepped through the hole in my fence where two planks are missing, and went up the back stairs to my flat. Later that night under the light of the full moon, waiting for my tea to steep, I happened to look out into the alley just in time to see a man on a bicycle stop beside the apple tree, lift the cardboard box to his shoulders, and ride off into the night with all of Marta's old things.

It was not until a few days later that I set about cleaning the jewellery box, inside and out, hoping to remove something of the decades of dust and lint and sticky fingers that had made their mark on its surfaces. Using a small dry-damp sponge that I had cut into the shape of a triangle so that I might wedge its points into the corners, I gently brushed the blue velvet interior, blowing now and again, to free some trapped thread or bit of what-have-you. As I worked, the music cylinder would chime an unsolicited note or two, having been roused to song from all the activity. Once I had cleaned the lining, I turned to polishing the mirror on the inside of the lid, careful not to remove the Japanese woman and the pagoda that been painted there. The mirror showed all signs of its age, and likely of its quality, for it was grainy and fogged in patches, and in this decrepit state it seemed to resemble a still pond in which one could make out the mottled pebbles on

the bottom. After the glass was cleaned, I carefully removed the small finishing nails from the top of the housing in which the music cylinder was installed. I wanted to examine its mechanics, and perhaps discover why it refused to play more than ten or eleven notes in succession even after it had been fully wound. Though I knew nothing of such things, it appeared to me as if the small brass piece worked according to the same principle as old-style player pianos, because like the larger instrument, its notes were predetermined by markings attached to a cylinder. These markings made me think too of the risen dots of Braille, and how the feel of them by a sensitive hand could communicate an unseen world. In the case of the music box, its cylinder bore small brass spikes which were read by little fingers of steel that raked against them when the cylinder turned, and so produced a particular note. As I looked at the mechanism, an image of my father came to my mind, and I remembered how he used to mow the lawn with an old manual mower that, like the music box, fulfilled its function by the rotation of a cylinder. I recalled how, during the summer months in the garden, he would always have a sunburn as red as a lobster's shell that covered only the lower half of his legs to his ankles; a space which corresponded exactly to that between the hem of his Bermuda shorts and the rim of his shoes. And too, looking at the steel fingers on the mechanism, I remembered his rake and how after the grass had been cut he would rake the clippings into little piles that smelled sweet in the hot air. He always took great care to collect the piles not long after he had made them, so that they did not have a chance to dry out and blow away in the wind; he would scoop the clippings onto the rake as if it were a shovel and dump the cut grass into the steel garbage can he always kept at the back of the house for this purpose. I thought also of how he, with his passion or rather his need to fix things, would have found it interesting that the same, or similar, technology that had been used to make music, was also used to communicate with the blind, and to slice a blade of grass, and who knew what other ends it had been made to serve over time. Despite my close analysis of the mechanism, and a little tinkering, I could not fix, no less identify,

whatever problem was preventing it from playing its tune. The cylinder would rotate for only a handful of notes before it stopped completely, and it would remain quiet until some invisible catalyst, minutes later, would cause a single note or two to suddenly ring out from the silence. From this scant information, I could not grasp what the tune was; and it seemed almost uncanny the way the cylinder would stop rotating just as I felt I was on the verge of naming it. And so, at first I thought it might be *Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star*, and then, *Somewhere Over the Rainbow*, and then, Beethoven's *Für Elise*, and then, something from the *Mikado*, and so on, until I was no longer sure whether what I was hearing was what I thought was likely, or what was actually being played. It was well past midnight before I gave up and placed the lid back onto the housing, and tapped in the finishing nails, sealing the music maker in its little coffin indefinitely. I turned my attention instead to replenishing the wood exterior, hoping that this would prove more rewarding. Underneath my kitchen sink, I had found some strongly scented wood cleaner, furniture oil, and an old shirt with which to clean the box, and I set to work removing a generation of dirt that had made the piece look rather lustreless. I pressed lightly, and cleaned in small circles, using a cotton swab to clean around the hinges and between the slivers of iridescent shell. Each time I moved my cleaning rag to a new spot, I was amazed to find that what I had just been cleaning had not been erased, for the cleaning fluid was so strong that my fingers prickled, and when I think of it now, I recall that for days afterwards I could not grasp a glass with any confidence, my fingerprints having been eaten away. I had opened the window in hopes of some fresh air, but the wind was down and the night was calm, and all that flowed into my workroom were the subdued sounds of late night. By the time I was ready to apply the oil, the hour was quite far gone; my head was extraordinarily heavy, and somewhere in my mind I recall thinking of the immense weight of rugby balls when they are wet. While I oiled the box, my eyes were locked in a near-sighted focus, searching out each thirsty grain in the dry wood; and so, what happened next must have been the result of this prolonged

concentration, and too, of the toxic fumes I had been breathing steadily for hours. I began, at some point, to envision myself within the landscape featured on the box as if, like Alice in Wonderland, I had somehow stepped into it; I do not know if I had shrunk into its world, or if its world had grown larger around me, but whatever the case, I fell into the most pleasant reverie in which I experienced the landscape as a living place. But as vivid and as deeply felt as it was for me in the moment, I have never been able to sense it in anything but the vaguest and most indistinct of ways since. At the time, it was as if I had been steeped in it, like a tea bag in water, completely immersed, and without any of the separation that would make detailed analysis possible. I recall sitting under a cherry tree in full bloom, a bed of moss formed a thick padding beneath me; the moss was emanating the kind of magnificent green that occurs sometimes in trees and plants when a flash storm suddenly takes hold and the sky turns dark purple and magenta. The sky in my dream, or whatever it was, was clear and blue; but there was too, a kind of pink wash to the atmosphere that sparkled every so often like tiny stars in daylight, or little prisms of broken glass suspended in the sky. I smelled the cherry flowers, but also the



scents of pine and cypress, and I tasted the dampness in the air that comes from water running nearby. I do not know how long I sat under that tree before the sight of an enormous blue hydrangea made me stand to take a closer look. I seemed to float towards the flowering plant, although my feet were on the ground moving as they always did, one

in front of the other. It was only when I arrived within a hand's distance of the shrub that I noticed the bush warbler sitting amidst its flowers, nestled near the puffy head of one of its longer stems. The warbler and I stared at each other for what seemed like a long time, although it may only have been seconds, and in that stare in which neither of us moved an inch, I felt that we engaged in some sort of creaturely communion in which we shared our adoration of this exceptional shrub that we had both been drawn to. We might have



gazed at each other indefinitely had it not been for the sound of a twig snapping in the forest, which made us both turn to look for its source. When I turned back to the hydrangea, he had flown off, the stem he had been standing on still bobbing gently. I walked away then, my back against the flowers and the forest, and headed up a sharp incline, until the grassy surface gave way to dirt, then to rocky ground, and then to traces of snow; I was climbing a vast mountain, effortlessly, and at an incredible rate, even though the scenery around me moved slowly by. I could not tell how high the mountain was exactly, for its summit was hidden by some clouds that had wrapped themselves around its highest peaks, as if to shelter the mountain's crown from the elements. About midway, I came to a resting hut, and inside found a stone basin of water and a bamboo

cup, and beside these, a long note written in characters which, paradoxically, I found unfamiliar, yet also seemed to understand; and even now, though I cannot recall what was written, I feel as if I had known what the message said. I filled my drinking glass, and carried it with me outside the hut where I sat on a large round boulder feeling the heat of the sun. It was intensely quiet there, on the side of the mountain, and I felt I could almost hear the struggle of buds pushing through the bark of the trees below, and the sound of the dry earth soaking up the melting snow and ice. I drank my water, which was the purest mountain spring water I have ever tasted, and I went back inside to fill my glass again. It was then that I heard wind chimes sound somewhere in the distance, and this is the last thing I remember before I awoke; I now wonder if it might not have been the sound of some escaped notes from the music cylinder which stole me from my dream. I was confused, to say the least, when I awoke; and it took several minutes for me to understand my circumstance. For snatches of the dream reality kept washing in and out of my waking mind, and the only way I knew to keep them straight was to reach for my notepad and pen and immediately write down what fragments of images and sensations I could recall. In part, I did not want to forget the dream, but more precisely, I wanted to preserve it like some museum piece that I could revisit time and time again. Despite my notes, I have never been able to recapture the experience, nor feel since, what I felt during those precious moments of bliss, and the more I try, the further away from it I seem to be. That night it took a long while before I felt sure enough to stand; I flexed my toes and fingers, rolled my neck, stretched from side to side, and finally, when I was sure that I was once again a fully physical being, I made my way to my bed, where I collapsed, fully clothed, and slept a dreamless sleep well past noon the next day.

The day was bright, and the afternoon sun illuminated my workroom with the kind of intensity that had often forced me, reluctantly, to partially close the drapes. I had to admit, that it was not without some trepidation that I had opened the door to my workroom that afternoon. I do not know what I expected really, but I do remember half-

wondering if the scene I had left the night before would still be going on without me. My nerves, it seemed, were a bit on edge, for when I sat down at the table to examine my efforts, my knee knocked one of the table legs, causing the music cylinder to release a few unexpected notes, to which I jumped back in mild astonishment. I felt rather ridiculous then, and so forced myself to concentrate on inspecting the jewellery box, inside and out. It had taken the oil well, and had none of that slippery residue that sometimes occurs on treated woods, and the velvet interior looked fresh and bright despite one or two rough patches. Indeed, had I been looking at the piece for the first time, I might have thought it was nearly new, notwithstanding the dings on the corners and some gouging around the hinges. Satisfied, I placed the box on one of the wall shelves in the living room where I might easily look at it, and returned to the work table to clean up the mess I had made the night before. It was then that I noticed, in one of the newspaper pages I had spread out to work upon, the announcement for the auction, scheduled that morning at the Roth estate. A wave of excitement passed through me. Since childhood, I had wanted to visit the Roth estate; then, because it was a mystery around which we children wove tales of horror and woe; and now, because I hoped to glimpse its reputedly exquisite Japanese gardens. My head always dizzies when I think, as I often do, about the way that chance events can pile up until we begin to doubt that they are really chance events at all. But if it was not simple coincidence that brought me to Marta's jewellery box the day of the print show, and if it was not sheer chance that I had discovered the newspaper announcement, then what was behind this series of events, linked only by their common concern with Japanese landscapes? And then too, I wonder in some strange way, what my own interest in this subject had to play in all of this, for a small part of me felt that I had sent out some call which had been answered across the dimensions of time and space. While not outside the range of probability, it did seem unlikely that these events occurred as they did - parallel in time and space - and with no causal connection between them. If time is really a river, like Newton thought, flowing

in one direction, would such meaningful coincidences still be possible? All of these things were in my mind as I reached for my rucksack and coat, and pedalled off on my bicycle towards the Roth estate hoping that I was not too late to explore the property.

The Roth estate was one of the largest of the great estates that had been built along the lakeshore in the first three decades of the twentieth century. As a child, I would assess the size of these sprawling properties by counting one hundreds of seconds as I slowly rode my bicycle on the road that ran alongside them, and although this method was not so scientific a way of measuring, variable as it was with the speed with which I pedalled and with which I counted, I remember always trusting its accuracy completely. In the decades since my childhood, many of the estates and their surrounding acres had disappeared; the properties had been sold to contractors who had demolished the older homes, and subdivided the land into small plots on which they built new houses of brick and aluminium siding in two or three repeating styles. The new streets that had had to be built to accommodate these modern family residences, were invariably named names like Robin Hood crescent, Sherwood Forest lane, and Friar's court. That the Roth estate had not yet succumbed to the bulldozers, and that it would continue to survive despite the developmental pressures bearing down upon it from all sides, had much to do with the determination of its proprietors, Beatrice Roth and her adopted son, Henry. The two, I later discovered, had spent the past two years in negotiation with the city to ensure that the deed was sound, and that the land would be left intact upon the death of Miss Roth, who, incidentally, had died at the breakfast table over her cup of coffee at the age of ninety nine, on the very day she had predicted, roughly one month before the auction. It had been the wish of Miss Roth and Henry, to preserve the gardens in their original state, and so the entire estate had been donated to an order of Buddhist monks who had been trained in the Japanese garden arts, and who would act as the property's permanent caretakers. The mansion itself, once emptied of its more opulent fixtures and pieces of furniture, would serve as the monks', certainly austere but slightly unusual, living

quarters, and would, in addition, be used throughout the year as a Retreat. When I arrived at the estate, I avoided the main gate which appeared to be automated, and instead chose the smaller pedestrian entrance off to the side which, to my relief, was closed but not locked. I parked my bicycle just on the inside of the extremely high stone fence which enclosed the entire property and prevented anyone from the road seeing what was inside. The fence was sufficiently high that it discouraged the curious, mostly school children, from scaling it, and as far as I knew, no person had ever trespassed onto the property in this manner. I was surprised to notice, once I started along the white gravel path, that I no longer felt any nervous anticipation, or anxiety about my late arrival even though the auction was, in all likelihood, already over, and I was now officially trespassing. Rather, I took each step with a quiet calm; a state I have only ever experienced in moments of great certainty in my life. The path I walked from the gates rose with a gentle gradient, and was lined with tall, thick cypress hedges which functioned as blinders that concealed anything from view save for the path directly in front of me. In the stillness of that afternoon, sandwiched between the dense conifers, through which not a sound could penetrate, I recalled that the cypress was a symbol of mourning, and in that instant I felt sympathy for Beatrice Roth, who I had never met, but who would not walk this path again. I became aware then, of a profound melancholy that seemed to emanate from the dark foliage itself, and as I walked, I began to feel a meditative state taking hold in which I felt both serenity and sorrow in the same moment. The path, which showed no signs of ending, had been getting gradually steeper since the gates, and so when I turned to look back at my footsteps in the gravel, I found that I could only see the most recent, the others having disappeared beyond the rise. I walked on, absorbed by the sound of the stones crunching beneath my feet, quite lost in the embrace of the cypresses and the play of shadow and light they cast upon the path. I might have been able to continue on in that state of tranquillity much longer had the path not been gradually narrowing, so that eventually, I began to feel more and more entombed the

further I walked. I continued on about one hundred yards in that rather oppressive situation before I saw the stone staircase that marked, to my relief, the end of the white gravel pathway. The staircase itself was carved into a steep embankment. Its fifty-odd stone steps ascended in an almost z-shaped pattern, which appeared to head straight to the heavens, for at the top, it seemed there was nothing but empty sky. But when I reached the top, what I discovered was a plateau which formed the extreme-most end of an immense garden with the most expansive view of distant scenery I have ever seen in the region; so tremendous, that I immediately forgot the confinement of the cypress path. I was faced with a landscape so well-composed that were it not for the quiet breeze that occasionally rustled the branches of the pines below me, I might have believed I were looking at a still-life on an immense canvas. The vast open sky floated around me, and was mirrored by the smooth even lake in the background, unusually quiet for this time of year. A low fog had risen just above the lake in scattered patches, and at first glance, it appeared as if it was a low grey mountain range, its hazy peaks emerging from the water like the tips of sunken continents. I breathed in a deep breath as if to swallow the scenery within me, making it part of my constitution, and felt the fresh air enter my lungs which must still have been expecting the thick warm air of the cypress hedges, for they convulsed slightly, and I began to cough uncontrollably. It was somewhere in the middle of this fit of coughing, which had so completely caught me by surprise, as when one swallows food down the wrong tube, that I had some difficulty getting myself under control, and found there was nothing to do but crouch on the grass, and let nature take its course. It was somewhere in the middle of this fit, that I felt a large hand on my back, patting gently. I coughed and coughed until my eyes watered, and when I turned to look at who my comforter was, my sides heaving and my face red, all I could see was the top of a large garden hat, and a pair of legs in boots. It was not until I had completely stopped coughing, that I was able to turn fully and greet the person that had been assisting me so kindly. I stood slowly then, to meet my saviour face-to-face, but all I

could see from below the shadow caused by the brim of his hat, was a pair of well-shaped lips set above a very finely sculpted chin, a subtle depression in its centre. A hand, still wearing a garden glove, offered me a canteen full of water. I am Henry, the mouth said, Henry Roth. I nearly began coughing again, when I heard his full name, but the lips merely smiled, and said, I see you like the garden air. He took off his hat then, and for the first time, I was able to meet the only living heir to the Roth estate, a tall, elegant Japanese man in his late sixties. I thanked Henry for the water, which had, in my moment of discomfort, seemed as delicious as the water from my dream the night before, and started to sputter out a few words, strung together not very coherently, about the beauty of the garden and my rather illegitimate reasons for being there, but before I could finish a sentence, Henry had begun walking away, towards a cluster of red pines. When he arrived there, he pulled out a rolled-up straw mat from behind one of the trees like some magician with his flying carpet, and gestured for me to join him there. By the time I had walked to the pines, Henry was sitting, peeling a pear with his pocket knife. I sat, and when I had finally settled, slightly annoyed at the noisy crinkling my coat made with each of my movements, Henry handed me a piece of pear, and said in a clear but quiet voice, I often like to sit with these trees, which by now are old friends to me. Oddly, they are older than the garden itself, even though they seem to exist so much within it. But in truth, they were here before I built the garden, and though most think the pond to be its centrepiece, I have always thought of this cluster of pines as the true centre, for it was here that I sat for hours at a time, sketching and resketching my plans. I recall, in fact, having a great deal of difficulty deciding how to irrigate the pond, among other things, and had revised the plans so many times that I almost tore them up and abandoned the idea for my garden completely. Then, I came here to this tree, and sat under it for a few hours, and fell asleep. And when I awoke, I took out my pen and wrote some figures and measurements and plans, and the answer came to me as if it had come up from the roots of this tree, and into my own mind as I slept; it was as if it had empathised with my plight

and come to my aid. Or perhaps, it was that I, by enjoying its embrace, had enabled whatever had been blocking my thinking to become unblocked just enough to find the solutions that had been floating in the fog of my imagination, just out of reach, all along. However it happened, this tree and those that surround it, are dear friends to me that I shall be sad to part with when I leave this garden behind, and return to Japan. Henry fell silent then, and my eyes wandered from the mixed plantings on the slope just in front of us, over to the garden's middle ground and the magnificent pond that was located there. On the banks, were the skeletal forms of red maples and zelkovas, closer to budding with each day further into spring. Amidst these, were plump evergreens and pines, red and black, their lush bodies a contrast to the stark forms of the other still leafless trees. The pond, which had caused Henry such trouble to plan, showed none of the difficulty in its execution. Though it was undoubtedly large for a pond, its surface appeared even more immense because of how its waters perfectly reproduced the sky above. And were it not anchored to the earth by the reflections of the trees, and by the handful of islands that had been built within it, one felt that it might have been possible for it to float away into the atmosphere, to join the larger body of sky from which it had been stolen. From this perspective, so high above the pond, the islands too appeared like miniature versions of the garden as a whole, for each had been planted with the same combination of trees and shrubbery, and likely flowers - though these were not yet in bloom - that were to be found all around the landscape. I rested my eyes on the ground in front of me, slightly overwhelmed at this generous expanse of nature so close to the city, and ultimately, melancholy at the thought that such places were fewer and farther between as the city grew, which it inevitably did. As I thought about the unstoppable spread of the city, and its likeness therein to some terminal disease that feeds upon its host and multiplies, Henry seemed to read my mind, the first of many times that day, for when he started to speak, he somehow addressed my thoughts. On some days, Henry began, this garden is not so beautiful as it is at this moment; today, we have been fortunate that the lake is quiet and

has none of the large industrial boats, nor even the smaller recreational ones with loud motors or music blaring or rambunctious water-skiers to contend with. When I first built the garden nearly forty years ago, as a young man of twenty nine, it was still possible to see the night fishermen out in their small skiffs, their lanterns swinging gently like overlarge fireflies in the dark of night. Then, they, like the seemingly boundless sky under which they rowed, and the multicoloured water upon which they fished, were part of the natural scenery of the garden. But at some point, the fishermen stopped fishing, for the stocks were impoverished and the waters became polluted, and so they are no longer part of the evening landscape here. It is regretful, but over the years, the garden has become an unstable place, for the scenery around which it was designed has changed in ways I could not always predict, nor plan for. And so many times, when I have sat in these pines and watched a freight ship go by, its black smoke spoiling the air, I have thought about raising the stone fence higher, or transplanting a wood of tall trees, or constructing a hill, so as to trim the offending view from sight forever, but I cannot bear to lose the almost universal expanse of water and sky even in its degenerate state. This garden was composed, you see, Henry continued, handing me another piece of pear from the blade of his knife, as a Japanese shakkei garden, which is to say that it borrows the distant scenery, and captures it as a living element, among all the other living elements in the garden. Like the lake fisherman of old who used to capture their fish with nets and rods, the gardener of the shakkei garden, must also use some device to capture the scenery alive, whether it be tree trunks, woods, posts or eaves, the sky, a stone lantern, or even, a well-placed window - some device which pulls the distance in nearer like some ripe catch of fish, and integrates it with the immediate surroundings. But the befouled scenery of the modern world means there is often no scenery left to borrow from; in a word, the palette has shrunk. Henry rose then, and asked if I would like to walk through the garden, and perhaps have a cup of tea in the tea house he had built on the hill on the other side of the pond. I was more than agreeable to his suggestion, for Henry's easy

manner and candid conversation was, from the start, an inseparable part of the garden's pleasures, and I wondered if he should not also be considered one of its living elements. Henry and I walked down the hill towards the edge of the pond and along the path which encircled it. Every so often, he would bend down and examine some plant or piece of grass he came upon, and it was some time before he spoke again. This garden was modelled after the Upper Garden of the Shugaku-in villa in Kyoto even though the distant scenery is all together different. There, it is not a lake, but rather the foothills and mountains of Mount Hiei that are captured by the empty sky. But in other respects, most of this garden's features are ostensibly the same, to greater or lesser degrees. The pond, for example, is named, like its predecessor, Pond of the Bathing Dragon, for the way its islands resemble sections of a dragon's serpentine back poking through the water. And it is true that on moon-lit nights, one can almost see the dragon bathing there, its back rising and falling with each fiery breath. Shugaku-in was designed by the retired emperor Gomizuno-o in the late seventeenth century, and it was there that he settled into retired life, and cultivated his appreciation of the tea arts, which is why the Upper Garden, unlike most shakkei gardens, is equipped with a teahouse, which I have copied nearly perfectly in every detail. At the north side of the pond, just below the approach to the tea house, Henry stopped to show me some unusual carp. He had never seen such a thing before, he claimed, but the carp, which had only recently reappeared after the long icy winter, kept swimming into each other, and bumping into the banks and stones and water plants, as if they were uncertain who they were, and what direction they were to go in life. At first, I wondered if it was not merely that they were still in their winter stupor; that they had yet to shake off that long sleep they enter for the colder months of the year, but we have had enough warm days now that I am no longer able to entertain that hypothesis with any confidence. Nor have I been able to determine whether or not their condition has been improving with time, that is to say, whether they seem to be learning with each passing day how to navigate the waters around them. Sometimes, Henry said, when I think about

leaving this home of mine in the coming weeks, and returning to a country which is my homeland, but in which I have not lived since I left at the age of nine, I feel an upset in the bottom of my stomach; a sort of weightless motion, which I can only call, fear. And I wonder, if this is what these carp feel as they bump into each other, and into objects they do not seem to recognise, in a pond that should be, but is not, wholly familiar to them. But like these carp, I too must keep swimming and swimming, and hope that one day, I will find my way. Henry reached into his jacket pocket then, and took out a handful of a flaky substance which he tossed on top of the water. We watched as three or four carp that had been swimming nearby, made their way toward the food, more than once setting each other off course, but eventually arriving there to have their fill.

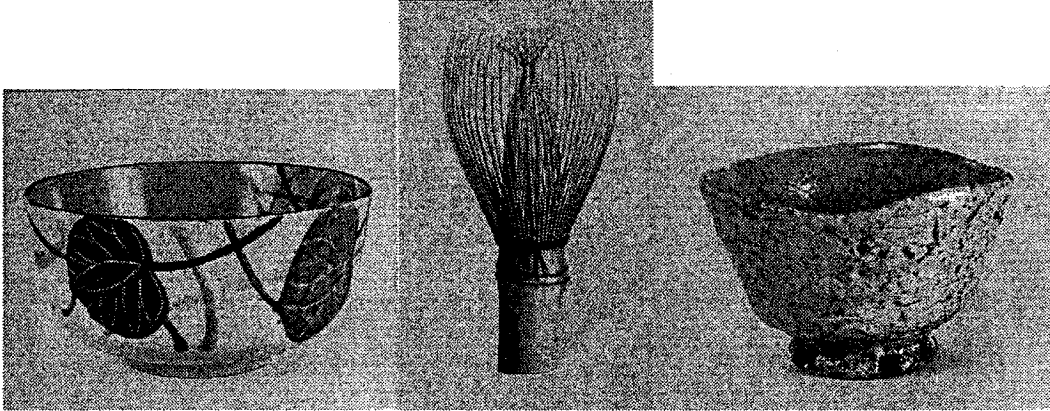
The teahouse was a dwarfish pavilion, on the side of a hill, nestled amidst a dense evergreen and pine forest. I recall thinking as I climbed the hill, looking up at the structure from below, how much it resembled a birdhouse, perched as it was amidst the trees, and for a moment, I felt again the true scale of the garden, and my own smallness amidst it, and I wondered if this is what birds feel, or whether their capacity for flight freed them from any such consciousness. At the top of the path, Henry opened a low bamboo gate, and we entered into a small courtyard style garden, enclosed by a clay wall, with a simple asymmetrical stone path winding gently through it to the tea house. All the features of the tea house, including its garden and pathway, Henry said, have been



designed to induce a mood of quiet contemplation amongst those who visit it. Here, it has been said by the tea masters of old, we are to feel remote from the dust of this world. And though I do not promise you an authentic tea ceremony here today, I trust that you will feel no dust upon your shoulders. I know of few places in the world, Henry continued, that have been designed to foster such quietude and attentiveness amongst those who visit it. These stepping stones, for instance, form what is known as the roji, or the dewy path, and have been laid so as to promote a shift towards stillness in the psychological state of those who walk it. Inside the garden, one is sequestered away; all distraction, even the distant scenery, has been removed from view so that the mind is free to focus on the details of simple things. So as one walks the roji, one may notice the pattern of the moss on the ground, or the curve of the fern over the stone basin, or how the basin's cool water purifies the mouth and cleanses the hands, or the penetrating angle of the stone lantern, or the tapping of a woodpecker on a faraway tree; but hopefully, what one will not notice, at least until much later, is the way one's mind becomes one with these things in moments emptied of time. When we had walked the stones, Henry handed me some slippers and gestured for me to sit, on a raised board-floored area, half-sheltered by broad eaves. He disappeared then, and re-emerged some moments later to say that the coals for the kettle were heating. Where you are sitting is the Senshi-dai, or Poem-washing Platform, Henry said; and while it is not a standard feature of tea houses, I could not imagine this structure without it. At Shugaku-in, it was where the guests of Gomizuno-o's poetry parties would sit to polish their verses as they listened to the sound of the waterfall nearby. And many nights, I too have sat on these boards and composed verses inspired by the rhythms of nature and the grace of simple things. Let us go inside, Henry said, as he crouched through a small entrance, which I followed him through. I often say that my teahouse is a perfect replica of Gomizuno-o's, and it is true that after I completed my architectural studies, I went to every length possible to confirm the accuracy of my design before I began to build. But it is also true, that one could spend a

lifetime accounting for the individual differences between each piece of wood, paper, bamboo, straw, and stone that were used to fashion this hut, and those used for its predecessor. In actuality, the perfect copy of Gomizuno-o's tea house can never be made; and this is, in the spirit of tea, exactly as it should be. In chanoyu, or the way of tea, Henry continued, that which is imperfect, odd, wretched, or aged is valued - whether it be the patina of the wood post that holds this ceiling up, or the rough glaze of the raku bowl in which one is served tea, or the warped clay of a tea caddy, or the frayed silk edging of a wall scroll - it is only in a condition of decline that an object acquires its elegance and worth. All great tea masters, Henry said, are also great collectors. It was then, that I told Henry, quite in spite of myself, as if he had flicked some switch within me, about my small collection of things, and the histories surrounding them, and of my efforts to write them down. We spoke briefly then of Walter Benjamin - whose work on the Arcades of Paris Henry was familiar with - and of Benjamin's interest in the antiquated figure of the collector, and in the fragments of history that he saw all about him. When the conversation had slowed, Henry went to a papered latticework door, behind which, was what he called, the preparation area, and as he located the tea caddy, and bowls, and whisk, and tea powder from upon its shelves, I sat on the tatami that lined the hut from corner to corner and soaked in my surroundings. The tea garden and its path had prepared me for the plain beauty of the room, and so I was not surprised by the lack of furniture or colour or decorations, nor did I miss these elements, for their absence only enhanced the mood of tranquillity within the space. I noticed a distinctly muted quality to the light, which Henry later explained was the combined result of many factors - the paper covered windows, the tatami flooring, and the unpainted surfaces of wood and clay - all of which absorbed light, so that one's mind would not be distracted by either glare or shadow. Of adornments, if they could be called that, there were only two: a bamboo vase with a single flower, and a scroll of calligraphy hanging upon the wall. Henry re-emerged, carrying a black cast iron kettle in one hand, and a small lacquer tray in the

other upon which was placed a tea caddy and two mismatched tea bowls all of which appeared to be of some age. I watched Henry pour water from the kettle into one of the bowls, which he then whisked until its tea had frothed and turned a bright greenish hue.



He handed me the bowl and gestured for me to drink, while he carefully cleaned the other with a neatly folded cotton cloth. I was sure the action was a ceremonial one, for the bowl was already clean, and watching him, I began to appreciate the way his movements were similarly clean and true, and without excess. Once he had finished, he made his own tea following the same procedure, and we drank our tea in silence. Though Henry had said nothing to indicate the need for silence, I found myself entirely without words, occupied instead by the taste of the tea, and the warmth of the bowl on my hands in the late afternoon chill. After all of our earlier conversation, I found the silence restful, but soon after I had finished my tea, I began to long for Henry to break the silence with one of his anecdotes or points of interest. But before I could utter the question that had been forming in my mind, which had to do with his inspiration for the garden, Henry took a deep breath, and said, perhaps you are wondering why, I modelled my garden and teahouse after those at the great imperial Shugaku-in villa. In a way, it is the decisive question of my life, for the answer touches on so many of those moments that changed its course forever. I lived happily in Japan until the age of nine, Henry began, alone with my mother, a painter of some skill and reputation. As for my father, I never knew him, nor heard his name mentioned, and to be honest, I was not troubled by this; I simply never

missed what I never had. Beatrice Roth was my mother's art dealer, and over the seven or so years they knew each other, they developed a close friendship. I remember Beatrice visiting our home in Japan a number of times before the worst of the war, and often she would stay with us for several days before setting off to visit various masters and art houses across the country, in search of rare finds for her international clients. When she would visit, the house was full of laughter and excitement, and I always looked forward with much anticipation to the presence of this green-eyed woman with the burgundy-brown hair, who laughed with her whole body in one instant, and who could be as composed and gracious as an elk in the next. After I had gone to bed, I would often watch the two of them, covetously, through the crack in the door, drinking sake late into the night, talking about art, and smoking cigarettes, fascinated to see this aspect of my mother which only Beatrice's visits brought to light. There was a friendship thicker than blood, my mother would say, whenever I asked her whether she missed her friend. And it is certainly true that had Beatrice, a woman of no blood ties to me, not come to my aid at war's end, it is very likely that I would have lived my life within the confines of a Japanese orphanage, entirely without prospects; a social outcast.

My mother died on Monday, August 6th, 1945, Henry resumed after a brief pause, the day the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, where she had gone to spend the weekend with my aunt who lived there. She was to return to our village that same day, but the bomb was dropped at 8:15 am, forty-five minutes before her train was scheduled to pull out of the station. My aunt had accompanied her to the train station, to sit with her until boarding, and to enjoy, I imagine, the last moments of their visit together over a cup of tea from the tea stall. I might well have been with my mother and aunt on that day, had it not been for a special school trip that had been planned to the imperial palace and gardens of Shugaku-in. At the time the bomb was dropped, I was in a bus heading to Kyoto, en route to the great Shugaku-in, singing songs and playing games with my classmates, completely unaware of the devastation that had occurred. We

could not know, for instance, when we disembarked from the bus, an hour later, to run excitedly upon the green grass of the Shugaku-in garden, that an enormous atomic cloud was still hanging in the air above Hiroshima, its gamma and neutron rays having not yet fallen to the earth. And as I ran about that day over foot bridges and around trees, the glorious sun on my face, I was unaware that those who had seen the blast were already talking of the other sun they had seen explode in the sky; a sun so powerful that it had caused those closest to it, like my mother and aunt, to disintegrate instantly into carbon ash. Others, less fortunate, felt their skin melting, and their faces inflate like balloons in heat that was so intense as to bubble their skin. And while, in Shugaku-in, the soft wind from the mountains caressed me and teased me, and brought me the fragrance of pine and cherry wood, the wind generated by the blast in Hiroshima, levelled concrete and brick buildings like matchstick houses, crushing those inside, and setting off fires throughout the city. That deadly wind ripped through the city not once, but twice, as it bounced off the mountains and returned for a second wave of carnage. This is how the Shugaku-in garden, and my mother, and the tragedy that befell her and my aunt, and all of Hiroshima on that day, and all of Nagasaki three days later, have become forever linked in my mind. It is staggering to contemplate how such tragedy can occur even as such joy is experienced somewhere else at exactly the same moment; it is, I feel, the sort of mental exercise that leads one either to madness, or to greater compassion. I understand, and have always understood in some way, that it was fortunate that I was surrounded by such natural beauty at the time when the bomb was dropped. For had I been elsewhere, somewhere more common, somewhere less of a testimony to life and earth and growth, I might easily have lost all faith in humanity at the tender age of nine. But with the maples and pines and bush clover and the large open sky above me, I was then, as I am now, unable to doubt the presence of goodness in the world, even when there is so much evidence to the contrary. It is for this reason that I have always devoted myself to this - to the garden, as if I must affirm the existence of goodness, over and over again. Henry

stopped talking then, and left the platform to scatter the wet tea leaves around the base of one of the ferns, leaving me upon the platform in a deep silence. Night had begun to fall and the full spring moon was already rising in the distance. For some time now, Henry said when he returned with the empty strainer in his hand, Beatrice and I have been preparing for the time when we would leave this estate; she, because she knew she was soon to leave this world for the next, and I because I have always known I would return to Japan upon her death. And so we have been selling off many of the possessions we have acquired over the years, many of the objects around which we had built our lives. Beatrice's collection of art objects - her various ceramics, prints, lacquerware, calligraphy, and embroidery works - her life's passion, each object lovingly sought out and chosen by her for its special qualities, have been donated to art galleries and libraries around the world, where they will be admired by many for decades to come. But as that eclectic philosopher you spoke of earlier, Walter Benjamin - who like myself was a profound lover of all forms of architecture, and who like Beatrice, was a devoted collector - has said: the phenomenon of collecting loses its meaning when it loses its subject. And although many more people will now be able to view fragments of Beatrice's exceptional collection, they will be looking, I fear, at objects emptied of their significance, for they have lost the collector who gave them their due. As for me, today I have sold the last of the articles of any value that were left in the house - the furniture, china, and silverware, some jewellery and evening wear that neither Beatrice nor I can make use of any longer - the profits of which are sufficient to finance my return to Japan. There, I intend to live out my old age, in teahouses and gardens much like the one in which we have passed the day, studying chanoyu, the art of tea, as I have always wished. It is strange, but I have always thought of my life here as one of exile from my homeland, and yet now that I am to return to it, free of all worldly attachments and of social station, I am more in exile than I have ever been. But it has been said, by the tea masters of old, that it is only from a position of exile that one can see the moon, which is to say, that one

can see things as they truly are. And so, impoverished, but with a pure heart and mind, I offer you this parting gift, with the wish that one day, you too will see the moon, and experience the true love of things, which is to the collector, as water is to tea. With that Henry made a deep bow and placed something I could not see in the palm of my hand, and closed my fingers around it. I do not know why, but it seemed right at the time, that I should not look at the gift until after we had parted ways, and so I returned his bow, and thanked him genuinely for his generosity. I had few words then, each seemingly too small for the task, to tell him how much I had enjoyed our meeting, and could do little more in the end, than wish him well with the hope that our paths would somehow meet again. When I left him, Henry was standing on his boarded platform, looking up at the moon, and it is this final image of him that will forever be frozen in my mind.

Upon my return home that night, I reached into my pocket where I had placed Henry's gift for the bicycle ride, and looked at what he had given me for the first time. It was a stone, carved and polished, about the length of my baby finger, and cut in the shape of an elongated hexagram. Cool and smooth to the touch, it had just enough weight to feel substantial in my hand. But what was truly remarkable about it, was the way its colours and markings combined to suggest a landscape painting of a single tree on the edge of an embankment, its naked top bending in the wind, blackened as if burnt. The tree stands against a flash of mustard yellow light, streaked with gold and orange, while in the distance a red apocalyptic sky rolls in. All about there is a mighty wind, and as I held this stone, I thought again of the existence of joy and sorrow in a single moment. After some time, I placed the stone in the top compartment of my lacquer jewellery box, and left the lid open, while I went to make a pot of tea; and when it was ready, I took my box, my stone, my chintz tea cup, and my biscuit tin - all the objects that formed my young collection into my study, where I sat with them for some time, looking now and then, at the moon that always shines its light through the corner pane of my window, thinking about all the history - lost, found, and made-up - in all of these old things.

REFERENCES

In the writing of this work a number of resources were consulted, quoted, or otherwise referred to.

Throughout the work, I have relied heavily on a number of Walter Benjamin's writings including: "Convolute H: The Collector" in *The Arcades Project* (London: Harvard University Press, 2002), "Unpacking my Library" in *Selected Writings*, Volume 2 (London: Harvard University Press, 1999), and "Theses on the Philosophy of History" in *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 1985). Also, I could not have written this thesis without the works of W.G. Sebald whose inspiration is limitless; in particular, *The Emigrants* (London: The Harvill Press, 1996), *The Rings of Saturn* (London: The Harvill Press, 1998), and *Austerlitz* (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2001).

In chapter one, Ms. Oneil's narrative of Joseph Priestley's life was based on some basic facts taken from the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (9th ed. 1875) and (1967 ed.). On chintzware, a collector's catalogue compiled by Linda Eberle and Susan Scott entitled, *The Charlton Standard Catalogue of Chintz* (Toronto: Charlton Press, 1996), and John Irwin's and Katherine Brett's *Origins of Chintz* (London: H.M.S.O., 1970) were most illuminating. Both Catherine Parr Traill's *Studies of Plant Life in Canada* (Toronto: W. Briggs, 1906), and Peter Tompkin's and Christopher Bird's *The Secret Life of Plants* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973) were essential to my understanding of the power of plants and our relationship to them. As to the history of tea drinking and tea drinkers, Agnes Repplier's *To think of Tea!* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1932), was most informative. My understanding of British-based tea etiquette was informed by Emily Post's *The New Emily Post's Etiquette* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1975).

In chapter two, Michael J. Franklin's *Biscuit Tins 1868-1939: The Art of Decorative Packaging* (London: New Cavendish Books, 2001) and his *British Biscuit Tins* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1984) were essential in providing the history of biscuit tin designs and manufacturing, as well as Franklin's own collecting and research experiences. The reference to the Borges story is, of course, that which begins Michel Foucault's *The Order of Things* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994). Alys Eyre Macklin's *Greuze* (New York: Franklin A. Stokes Co., 1907) was a pleasure to read and was most enchanting on Greuze's life and art. Catherine Parr Traill's *Pearls and Pebbles: or, Notes of an Old Naturalist* (Toronto: Briggs, 1894) was essential to my knowledge of her life and work, as was her well-known *Studies of Plant Life in Canada* (Toronto: W. Briggs, 1906). A collection of Traill's correspondence entitled, *I Bless You*

In My Heart edited by Carl Ballstadt, Elizabeth Hopkins and Michael A. Peterman (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996) was truly interesting and useful, as was Peterman's and Ballstadt's *Forest and Other Gleanings: The Fugitive Writings of Catherine Parr Traill* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1994). Charlotte Gray's *Sisters in the Wilderness* (Toronto: Viking, 1999) was also enlightening. The harsh experiences of the Antarctic expedition of 1910 are recorded by Scott himself in *Scott's Last Expedition*, (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, Volume 1, 1913), while Ann Savours's *Scott's Last Voyage* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1974) helped to round out my knowledge of the expedition.

In chapter three, my knowledge of Japanese decorative arts was informed by Sherman E. Lee's *Japanese Decorative Style* (Cleveland: Cleveland Museum of Art, 1961) while various titbits of information about Japan were gleaned from Herbert G. Ponting's *In Lotus-Land Japan* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1910). On Japanese garden art, Teiji Itoh's *Space and Illusion in the Japanese Garden* (New York: Weatherhill, 1973) was very helpful, as was Masao Hayakawa's *The Garden Art of Japan* (New York: Weatherhill, 1973). Information pertaining to the art of tea and the tea ceremony was obtained from Rand Castille's *The Way of Tea* (Tokyo: Weatherhill, 1971) as well as Dennis Hirota's fascinating *Wind in the Pines* (California: Asian Humanities Press, 1995). On the Atomic bombing of Hiroshima, the A-Bomb web museum was enlightening at <<http://www.csi.ad.jp/ABOMB/data.html>>.

PHOTO CREDITS

A number of photographs also appear in this work for which the author was most grateful. In order of appearance, according to chapter, they are:

Chapter One

Dürer, Albrecht. Melencolia I. (Engraving, Bartsch 74, 1517). From Raymond Klibansky's, Erwin Panofsky's and Fritz Saxl's *Saturn & Melancholy* (London: Nelson, 1964). Plate 1.

Sharples, Ellen. Joseph Priestley. (National Portrait Gallery, London). From *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1967 ed.). 501.

"A house mouse eats stolen grain." From *The World Book*, Vol.13, 2003. 900.

Grimwades Ltd./ Royal Winton. "June Roses – Pelham" swatches. From Linda Eberle's and Susan Scott's *The Charlton Standard Catalogue of Chintz* (Toronto: The Charlton Press, 1996).

Chintz tapestry, 17th century, Coromandel coast. From *Origins of Chintz* (London: H.M.S.O., 1970).

Ebeling & Reuss Co.. "Encore" in *Crockery & Glass Journal*, April 1950. From Linda Eberle's and Susan Scott's *The Charlton Standard Catalogue of Chintz* (Toronto: The Charlton Press, 1996).

Weber, Paul J.. "Emily Post: In her garden at Edgartown." From Edwin Post's *True Emily Post* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1961).

Chamberlin, Agnes D.. "Four-leaved Loose-Strife (*Lysimachia quadrifolia*) & Marsh Vetchling (*Lathyrus palustris*)." From Catharine Parr Traill's *Studies of Plant Life in Canada* (Toronto: William Briggs, 1906). Plate XI.

"Afternoon Tea table." From *The New Emily Post's Etiquette* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1975).

Image of a Steaming Teapot. From Agnes Repplier's *To Think of Tea!* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1932). 109.

Chapter Two

Huntley & Palmers. "Waverley" biscuit tin. From M. J. Franklin's *Biscuit Tins 1868 - 1939: The Art of Decorative Packaging* (London: New Cavendish Books, 2001). 9.

Greuze, Jean Baptiste. *Boy with Dog* (Wallace Collection, London). From Anita Brookner's *Greuze* (Elek, London: 1972). Plate 51.

Peek, Frean & Co. Ltd.. "Boy with Dog" biscuit tin. From <http://members.rogers.com>. 6/19/03.

"Ancient Symbolic Figure Signifying the Writer of Mysteries." From *Encyclopaedia of Superstitions, Folklore, and the Occult Sciences of the World* (Detroit: Gale Research Company, 1971). Frontispiece.

Cabrera, Elsa / AP Photo. Image of a giant Octopus washed-up on shore. (Centro de Conservacion Cetacea, Los Muermos, Chile). From <<http://news.yahoo.com>>. 7/3/03.

Genealogy. "James Peek's mausoleum." (West Norwood Cemetery, S. London). From <<http://community.webshots.com>>. 6/19/03.

Author's photo. "Hillside Cemetery." (Lakefield, Ontario). 8/13/03.

Artist unknown. Miniature of Thomas Traill. (Champlain Society). From *I Bless You In My Heart: selected correspondence of Catherine Parr Traill*. Edited by Carl Ballstadt, Elizabeth Hopkins and Michael A. Peterman (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996). 9.

Catherine Parr Traill. From Catherine Parr Traill's *Studies of Plant Life in Canada* (Toronto: William Briggs, 1906). Plate I.

"Westove." (Lakefield Ontario). From *I Bless You In My Heart: selected correspondence of Catherine Parr Traill*. Edited by Carl Ballstadt, Elizabeth Hopkins and Michael A. Peterman (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996). 117.

Artist Unknown. Reydon Hall. From Charlotte Gray's *Sisters in the Wilderness* (Toronto: Viking, 1999). 10.

Klimt, Gustav. Kammer Castle by the Attersee II. (Private collection). From a greeting card printed by Nouvelles Images. (France: 1997).

Peek, Frea & Co. Ltd.. Peek Frea Advertisement, circa 1910. (Reading Museum, Reading). From <<http://www.huntleyandpalmers.org.uk/>>. 1/3/04

Bowers, Lieut. H.R.. "The Polar Party: On the Trail." 360.

"The Polar Party's Sledging Ration." 266.

Bowers, Lieut. H.R... "At the South Pole." 374.

"Dr. Atkinson's Frostbitten Hand." 232.

"Finnesko." 228.

Facsimile of the Last Words of the Journal. 403. All from Robert Falcon Scott's *Scott's Last Expedition, Vol. 1*. Arranged by Leonard Huxley (McClelland, Goodchild & Stewart, Toronto: 1913).

William Crawford & Sons. "Globe" Biscuit Tin. From M.J. Franklin's *Biscuit Tins 1868 - 1939: The Art of Decorative Packaging* (London: New Cavendish Books, 2001). 142.

Chapter Three

Shubun. Winter and Spring. From Sherman E. Lee's *Japanese Decorative Style* (Cleveland: The Cleveland Museum of Art, 1961). 46-7.

Konohana-Sakuya-Hime-No-Mikoto, A Goddess of Mount Fuji (Wood Block Print, Second Station, Yoshida Trail). From Frederick Starr's *Fujiyama: The Sacred Mountain of Japan* (Chicago: Covici-McGee Co., 1924). 124.

Ponting, Herbert G.. The Nara Pagoda. From Herbert G. Ponting's *In Lotus-Land Japan* (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1910). 184.

Katsukawa Shunshi. Two Courtesans Writing a Letter. 102.

Watanabe Shiki. Irises. 86-7. Both from Sherman E. Lee's *Japanese Decorative Style* (Cleveland: The Cleveland Museum of Art, 1961).

"Musai Bridge and Garyu Pond, Eiho-ji." (Toyo-oka, Gifu Prefecture). From Masao Hayakawa's *The Garden Art of Japan* (New York: Weatherhill, 1973). Plate 48.

Ogata Kenzan. Hollyhocks and Plum Branches. From Sherman E. Lee's *Japanese Decorative Style* (Cleveland: The Cleveland Museum of Art, 1961). 82-3.

Sesshu. Bird and Flowers. From Sherman E. Lee's *Japanese Decorative Style* (Cleveland: The Cleveland Museum of Art, 1961). 48

"Great-Uncle Alphonso." From W.G. Sebald's *Austerlitz* (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2001). 89.

"Steppingstone approach to Fushin-an Teahouse." (Omote Senke School of Tea, Kyoto). From Masao Hayakawa's *The Garden Art of Japan* (New York: Weatherhill, 1973). Plate 153.

“A general plan for the tea garden.” 115.

“Okoshi-ezu (standup paper model of a tea hut).” 147. Both from Rand Castille’s *The Way of Tea* (Tokyo: Weatherhill, 1971).

“Two kakemono (hanging scrolls) of calligraphy” and “A bamboo wall vase.” From Rand Castille’s *The Way of Tea* (Tokyo: Weatherhill, 1971). 234-5.

“Aoi no Ue, Kenzan’s famous bowl.” 222

“The standard form of chasen (tea whisk).” 232

“Ko Hagi (old Hagi) bowl.” 222. All from Rand Castille’s *The Way of Tea* (Tokyo: Weatherhill, 1971).

The U.S. Army. “Enormous Atomic Cloud.”

From <<http://www.csi.ad.jp/ABOMB/RETAIN/exp.html>>. 5/8/04.