
Senior Projects Spring 2018

Bard Undergraduate Senior Projects

Spring 2018

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Jackson A. Blau
Bard College

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Recommended Citation

Blau, Jackson A., "To Play a Game" (2018). *Senior Projects Spring 2018*. 198.
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To Play a Game

**A Senior Project Submitted to
the Division of Languages and Literature
of Bard College**

**By Jackson Blau
Annandale-on-Hudson, New York
May 2018**

*To family, friends, those close and not
To strangers, and the rest,
I offer you this starting scene, announcement of the test:*

*The shallow river Rubicon marked down the Roman lot
Beyond its writhing redness was the capital there sought.
Upon the crossing of that point, where no return was set,
Caesar, cut the river, spoke, "Alea iacta est."*

PREFACE

What hideous thing sits within these pages should go some way towards announcing itself; as a result of this fact I feel that, should you desire the full overwhelming force of the work be delivered directly to you, you should forgo reading this preface, as it will do little but spoil and signpost the basic structures, which should be enjoyable enough to attain without my direct guidance. I recommend you return to this if you're finding the style of this work too self-indulgent to bear, and need a primer to engage with instead of the "real thing".

If you're still here, though: I will attempt to explain, in short form, what this project is attempting to do, what shapes that attempt takes, and what might ultimately be gained from such efforts put forward. While I do believe this explanation will be counter to the spirit of novelty critical to the success of any work, I believe also that, should I not explain in broad-strokes the actions I've taken herein, I might come across only as a rambling idiot, without any critical faculties. Again, though I do believe that this project's claim "hinges upon the denouement" (and thus cannot be fully felt from the front-end), for those unwilling to "play the game" of close-reading, or those who deem participation unnecessary for gaining the full effect, march then with knowledge into these petty shallows.

The essential arguments of this work are meant to articulate two claims: one of these claims is about Bard College, the institute to which this intellectual work is being given; the other is about a concept in language, which seems to exist fully and fundamentally within language, despite the fact that it is often considered as having a nature grounded in physical reality. The first claim is that Bard, as an institution, designed as it is, and bearing its singular history and contemporary culture, is a place which foregrounds and rewards, as the dominant strategy, a kind of elusive and manipulative behavior. This argument put forward makes rise the

opportunity to speak to the fact that Bard, such as it is, has the capacity to be treated as a “game;” if this is a place wherein one might “play” out different “strategies” to attain various ends, ends which might be understood as “win-” and “lose-states,” then it becomes important to understand precisely what that word “game” actually means. To approach definitions of both “play” and “games,” the senior project is used as a lense, itself a microcosmic staging-ground (or magic circle, to apply to appropriate terminology) for such gambits to be made within. This transition from a discussion of Bard, becoming a discussion of language, indicates the major movement of the work. With such a claim made, the second is introduced to buttress the first: “Play” is a construction only of language, and has almost no actual definitive traits, though some have argued otherwise. By taking *those* arguments on (specifically those arguments put forward by Roger Caillois), the conclusion is made that play is something which is ever manufacturing, engaging with, and attempting to produce a kind of novelty, and can be deemed as play only when such novelty is involved. This has the combined effect of both showing the depth of my own literacy, and removes some of the edge of what might be otherwise considered a critique. Because it is only an assertion rooted in language, calling Bard a “game” means nearly nothing. Everything is but a play.

This is the basic gist of the project, but it is, again, not obvious at first that these are the efforts being attempted. The reason for this is because this project — or rather this attempt, gambit, manoeuvre — is itself playful, evasive, and a manufacturing of a kind of novelty in itself. As I’m making such an argument, wound and bound up within self, both mine own, and the college’s, it only makes sense that the structure of the this work speak as much to the claims on offer, as any of the more literal arguments put down. As play is a construction of language, it is an idea, and can be found wherever anyone has the gall to announce the significant feature of

novelty; thus it is the same here: to prove Bard's game quality, I announce this whole as a "play gesture," with feints, dips, dives, strikes, and scores made within to speak the same parallel claims articulated directly with words. Thus, put bluntly, the form is the sound attempt at proving the argument made in direct language.

It is important, while still performing this act of delineation at the beginning, to speak to the section of this work which is most seemingly out of sync with the rest, that being the exegesis of two pieces of extraneous documentation found within the college library. This section I believe to be the greatest announcement of the "fact of the game," and this is precisely because the game itself manifest most obviously in form (which is itself a rhetorical device), and not in any of the language that surrounds that form. That analytic section is not straightforward, and is in fact a bit nonsensical — this is intentional. Such nonsense may serve as the most effective example of the dominant strategy herein. If it is through abjuration that one succeeds, and through deliberate application of it, then within a section most obviously obscure there should be found the most virtuous details, and the greatest triumphs of the total work. If the senior project is treated as the culmination of the entirety of one's education, then it is there in the brume of the midsection (its proper gut) that one may find the half-digested meat of this whole thing. It's dark in any body's viscera; here too it is no different.

I leave off with the simple appeal to my readers: don't take this — or anything, really — too seriously. It's a pithy request, but I hope it registers for my board, my friends, and any unfortunate students who stumble upon this whack fakkin thang in the future. There's no reason to get caught up in your interior bullshit: no one actually cares, anyway. If you don't learn the lesson of abjuration which this project ultimately advocates for, then take on instead the first and

final sentiments of grey emptiness, and a lack of sentimentality. They'll both serve you, but one is infinitely more sublime.

Anyway blah blah blah love happiness I couldn't have done it without you good luck cheers cheers you're the best thanks for having me let's get the show on the road.

To Say Its Name

Attempts at the construction of a senior project have been, for me, torturous; all efforts have been punctuated by a series of feelings which are, I believe, familiar to most (or if not most, then many) who have undertaken this task in any serious way. The feelings, simply articulated, are Fear, Inadequacy, Revulsion, and Repudiation; these may be joined with Revelation, Return, Resolve towards the end of the process. These feelings are still in me, but I anticipate there are

conclusions here which may all manifest as separate but equal things, in some tripartite concoction, at the close: If you're unlucky — or sentimental, as many Bard students surely are — these prior sensations will turn to Regret. If you've learned your lesson (cog), the yield will be Resignation. If you're a true Bodhisattva, the shine of your command — the sparkle of your chiming — will yield Resplendence.

The “Fear”¹ is not as simple as the “Inadequacy” itself, but is certainly inspired in part by it. The “Fear” is a feature which anyone approaching the unknown faces: there is a darkness that we must tackle, an unilluminated corner, and we, through our interior light, must shine upon it, and reveal that previously obscured corner to the world. The terror at this unknown can be exacerbated by the feeling that we are, fundamentally, agents of the aforementioned “Inadequacy” — our light is not bright enough, we haven't got the words to speak; or, more damning, what light we have does not compare to the sense that we might have been brighter before we had to prove ourselves. This, in turn, turns us ever inward, and outward, to manifest “Revulsion” — but not yet to the act of production; we “are” not — yet. “Revulsion” speaks in inaction: I'm disgusted at this me, which cannot shine the way I need it to, upon something, anything, which I care about.

For the literature student, this revulsion might be exceptionally complex. The topic upon which any writer expounds is often just the petty fetish of an artistic mind which has been given the wrong tools for reproduction, and so must paint a vivid picture not with colors, but with signatures and associations. It is a deeper image, but its fetishized object is often too small to bear the weight, without crumbling at the absurd heft placed upon it. And, anyway, rarely is the topic anything but a ritual statue held in the recesses of that mind, meant to be prayed and bowed

¹ Refer to PARAGRAPH: 1 for the initial tangle of thorns; let the rest serve as the untangling.

down towards as an object of worship, not closely observed as a relic of study, or an eternally illuminating candle.

This is the problem with the fetish, and any object deserving of praise. It is an unspoken truth, an announcement of itself always: the thing speaks silently into being the worth it carries, and has no need to speak beyond it; the contours of the carving, or nuance of the writing, or significance of the cadence, or mastery of the language, is something which the art itself says, and needs no interpreter. *That* is why we worship it. We placed that beautiful object — whatever it may be — into our mind, not to study, but to revere. That reverence reserved, we say now, “remove it, or else act as profane saint of your fractured focus.” No ritual revelation will ever be as rich as the truth which preceded it, and no interpretation will make the words deeper than their depth already is. To act upon the written words with written words obscures their truth; further light does not appear, but perversely veils the meaning of the object, and blinds us to the object’s worth.

And so “Revulsion” turns to “Repudiation”: Look away, one is compelled to say. Look away.

This is the depth of it — hopefully — for most involved. And it is at some point herein where things begin to change. The “Revelation” is at hand, and takes the shape of a realisation that, yes, my god, I’ve got to get some thing in. Any thing, my god, or anything, my GOD... — Ya... —Wha... —I... —Uh... Yes. Yes!

Perhaps it was the case that that “Revulsion” and “Repudiation” require synthesis — *the “Revelation” is at hand*: here it sits upon the wheeling, and like a falcon, flying to the falconer, we hear the cry: “Return” —

Upon the gyre turning freely, manifests within “Resolve,” and all “Revulsion” that was felt gives rise to the sense that it was that way determined: To hoist our fetish as an art was always going to be profane; an acceptance of our status as febrile hierogrammates, or founding hierodules was simply in order.

This brings about our final form for the show. As we must make the “Return,” and must feel it to make our proper testing, we “Resolve” either to produce the magnificent work we have within us, and act despite our shadows, or simply make our way because that darkness could never be subdued. “Revelation” was the revelation not only of the moment of our culminating judgement, but also the revelation of our own assessment of self — we are revealing to ourselves who we are, and this brings about its own ends.

So ushered in is “Regret,” the sentiment felt that *this, here*, was a time well-wasted, and turned the figure tested into a bitter solipsist, self-reflexive to a fault, and unwilling then to take advantage of an opportunity; all that good offered has been wasted, and the sentimental final take-away is the sense that one could have been more. This is the mindset I suspect many feel, but it is a valuable lesson: this was just a test — it all only ever is.

It could also be, at the end, that a person feels the weight of “Resignation,” a kind of greyed acceptance, formed by the accretion of meaningful experiences which have all been deemed meaningless because they have not truly been seen. The feat of the individual, resigned, is that they produce an object of themselves, and yet feel no tether to it, despite its profound and direct connection to how they have been, and continue to be. This too is a lesson: we can persist in fog, if we feel content in it: this was just a test — it will all be over soon.

There is also the profound proceeding of the one who fundamentally understands, who is able to step beyond their myopia, and yet embody it with glowing and brilliant behavior, and

who can move from all these sentiments to a place beyond. This person, invested in an outpouring of their own “Resplendence,” is able then to give out an understanding, not only of the thing they sought to uncover, but also of the fashion by which they had come to it. Perhaps it is the case that all along, each step of the way was so brilliant, and the start was as supreme as the end: this was just a test — succeeding is gauged by successive action; each moment has been success.

And now to the absurdity, the flexing fluxional stone that stems the flow for myself, and many others. The process of devising, for and by a one, the meaningful capstone project by which an individual will internally and externally sum up themselves, as some apotheosis of an education up to that point, is akin to asking a man to reach enlightenment by strenuous physical exercise, or by asking him to document the apex of a mountain by imagining what features the rock might have in those heights. These requests are, on some level, meaningful, but the striving will forever highlight the inadequacy of the attempt, especially when juxtaposed against the real thing: the brawny athlete became no buddha by sweat alone, nor did the artist transfigure the true majesty of the mountaintop onto the page without first making it there on foot. The request of the senior project, at first glance, is essentially to then, simply, transcend.

While closer inspection will yield why this is not ultimately the end goal (the lesson being borne by and on the journey, not from or with its destination), the value of the insight, that this is the culmination of one’s very *being* as a student, is not unwarranted. An inspection of nearly any senior project within the last several years will reveal that there is something deeply, terrifically meaningful in the act for all who indulge it. The length of the acknowledgment pages indicate this clearly: most reach around a page in length, and are the heartfelt announcements that “yes, I’ve made it, I’ve finally become, at the end, the student I — and you — knew I could

be. Revel, friends and family of mine; I am that hero you saw in me; here is my boon from out the void, I offer it unto you, my village, who made the gift-giver you see before you.”

This is not just a capstone project: this is the articulation, for many, of the meaning of their existence as people, because for most engaged, this is the point at which they stop being young, insipid students, floundering in the world. This move from student to writer, researcher, reveler, reader, responsible actor, is the move that says we are no longer children, no longer coddled in the same fashion by institution. All fear we’ve faced on the path to this point was warranted, but we took up arms against a veritable sea of troubles, just to show that we could, and in the process learned to crystalize our thoughts to proffer unto others.

It might be more accurate then to say, rather than the insight that this is a transcendence — which seems to be a misapprehension of what is truly on display — that this deposit of intellect which these bound projects are is only the minute observance of the moment, a moment, our moment, and nothing more.

The whole act of being a participant in this year-long test is what seems to be evaluated; what seems to be of most value is attending to the image of a one so thoroughly invested. That indication of investment, some sweat-covered rag that this document might be, would veritably be the sign of moments, and the marker by which the tribunal truly gauges. The claims are not of so much worth, but rather the stains of self that seem smeared upon them. No one expects *too* bright a light; we are dim. There is an important observation which must be made here, however. What is a sign of self, and what speaks of it in a manner most true to that self, is what is deemed most valuable, this appearing to be the case for nearly everything in the literary realm, wherein it is by intuition and impression that most works are understood — critical reflectors no exception. As a feature of the fact that people don’t read, it stands to reason that written works are

understood on the grounds of feeling; thus this writing was not to be a testament to the ideas one has, but to the ritual that created it. There is some foggy guideline — valuable itself for its fogginess — that I'll attempt to break down in more detail shortly, but ultimately what we mark down is the sign that we have finally embodied the ritual sentiment, and are, or have become, attuned to the spirit of the academy.

What, then, might it mean to become so attuned? At a place like Bard, I posit it would have manifold meaning: we've a duty to adopt the bardic cadence, a mastery of language, an identity creative, and a kind of subdued Christian Religiosity. Most of these are simply defensible interpretations of a place so titled. On Bard's campus, expect that one becomes a mercenary poet plying his trade as an alliterative wayfarer, and learns to take up that mantle, not as a Bardian, but a proper Bard. What may be less obvious is that subdued religiosity (in explaining it, I hope I don't accidentally reveal it too much, and muddle that other virtue of this place, which is revealed in time).

The religious sentiment, echoed in the cornices and steeples of our chapels and relic-houses, comes from the history and title of the place, and the very land itself. Looking through Bard's archived materials concerning its story², we see the origination of Bard College was fundamentally rooted in two things: Estate Culture of the Hudson Valley, and the Episcopal Diocese of New York. The connections came from the three founding members: the first, Bishop

² To attain this historical sustenance, I'm turning to a book written by Reamer Kline, "Education for the Common Good: A History of Bard College the First 100 Years, 1860-1960;" the man does an excellent job of collating significant material for future researchers upon the academy, and makes my job of seeking long-lost texts all the easier, as he was a faithful curator. And, faithful, actually, in a few senses, as he too embodied the shadowy religious legacy of this Christian college, through his title as Episcopal priest. Reamer, or as I call him, big-food-daddy, has unfortunately left a legacy of gluttony, as namesake for the common dining hall, despite in life having been priest, antecedent President to Botstein, and glorious bearer of the now out-of-vogue ducktail (queue-de-canard) . While the case I'm making at this junction is about the broader subdued religiosity — and the fact that it is embodied by shadows and misgivings we all seem to collectively share — it may also be possible that we in some way manifest our new religion through bold consumption; in big-food-daddy commons we enact our modern sacrament.

Horatio Potter; the second, the clergyman John McVickar, (he an uncle to the last founder); the third, philanthropist John Bard (who, landed man, was the tie to the “Estate culture”). At its founding, the college did not possess the same namesake — this place was St. Stephen’s College.

An aside: this past title, it should be pointed out, bears as much significance to this history as the title “Bard” does to the contemporary student and space. For the uninitiated in my crowd, Saint Stephen (*another aside: the Greek word Stephanos means crown, implies achievement, echoes attainment*) was prosecuted as what we know to be the first Christian martyr. Around 34 A.D., Stephen is drawn before the Sanhedrin — that is, the rabbinic tribunal of Israel— for false claims that he has been offering blasphemous teaching about Moses. Brought before the council, Stephen brings to his defense stories of the Old Testament wherein prophets are decried and sent away to the detriment of the communities they’re pushed from. Both Joseph’s and Moses’ tales are raised as examples in his ultimate claim against the rabbis that “You always resist the Holy Spirit! Was there ever a prophet your ancestors did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him— you who have received the law that was given through angels but have not obeyed it.”³

Obviously, the Sanhedrin don’t like being told that they’ve disobeyed the cosmic order they’re meant to be defenders of, and are thus made furious by the accusations. As a response, Stephen is stoned. In his stoned state, “Stephen prays, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” Then he fell on his knees and cried out, ‘Lord, do not hold this sin against them.’ When he had said this, he fell asleep.”⁴ I know, when I get stoned, I fall asleep — and at a place so named, it’s no

³ Acts, Book 6 and 7, New International Version

— I actually recommend that the readers of this essay also read Acts 6 and 7 — they’re highly illuminating.

⁴ Ibid.

surprise that we habitually get our stonings in, to honor our old patron saint, the premier pre-Christian martyr. But this is not the only thing which makes our Stephen so meaningful: he was a symbol of retort and exhortation. His action was a condemnation of the system in place, and the people who killed, to the Christian observer, yet another prophet.

And so the college was once titled after this sassy man. Aside over, we're brought back to Potter, John Bard and McVickar⁵. Their institution was an exhortation of what had become of academic institutions of their day — they were amidst a world which was becoming extremely secular, a world wherein — God forbade — people were not joining the ministry. This may be read as the primary organizing principle to Saint Stephen's College, at the outset. This is what the documentation indicates:

Eventually, in the records of the Diocese and the College, the arrangement under which these three brought the College into being became known as the “tripartite agreement.” This was an understanding, informal at first and slowly made more definite, to the effect that the Church as represented by Bishop Potter would recognize the College as an official agency of the Diocese, and commend it for support to Church agencies and to private individuals in the Church; that the Society for Promoting Religion and Learning, as represented by Professor McVickar, would give financial support to the institution and to its students; and that John Bard would be the donor of the necessary land and buildings to get the college into operation.⁶

⁵ It is worth noting that Potter and McVickar persist, after Saint Stephen's fashion, as the namesakes for to dorms collectively known as Stone Row — wherever one turns, a history of getting stoned, and a deep relation to it, is implied.

⁶ Reamer Kline, *Education for the Common Good: A History of Bard College the First 100 Years, 1860-1960*; (Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY, 1982) page 10

We see, from this delineation, that the founding of the college was fundamentally related, again, to the Diocese' will and the investment of religious benefactors. If John Bard's Christian qualities are not evident here — more obviously a good samaritan than a passing priest — we need only refer to the following quote to determine the state of the man's faith and investment.

In those first years (and continuing until his removal to Europe in 1868) the College was very much an extension of Mr. Bard's own personal churchly interests and there was no clear line of demarcation between the life of the College and that Mr. Bard's estate and the involvement of his personal and churchly associates.⁷

Supposing for a moment my possession of a poetic license — a possession; haunting, oh, so Bard — we may be able to see, even here and so early on, that the “tripartite agreement” of the college's inception has a parallel in the “tripartite concoction” that the senior project brews in each of us students. Our history is a haunting, and imbues itself silently into our modern affects. But the trick lies in finding which person parallels which aspect: is Potter perhaps the agent of “Resplendence,” carrier as he was of the religious affiliation? Or, more fitting, he may be a sign of “Resignation,” a bishop carried to the task of administration, and thus resigned to perform tasks of mediocrity for the sake of some “higher good.” There is no judgement negatively associated with this resignation: in point of fact, it is simply a sign that there is acceptance, and a signing off on the proceedings. So it is articulated by Mr. Kline: “Seeing St. Stephen's as an arm of the Church, Bishop Potter gave the College his unfaltering support.”⁸ It's difficult to peg either John as “regretful;” they both seemed to have great hopes for their works and aspirations:

⁷ Ibid, 20

⁸ Ibid, 11

perhaps it is the case that the McVickar, whose story is one seemingly only of staid ideological influence, may be free to take on the aspect of “Resplendence.”

For the sake of the claim, I’ll say simply that of the three men, the most likely to have encountered the campus “Regret” would be John Bard. In regards to the college, he seemed to suffer the most, both at the hands of fate and friends. “(...) in their zeal for their cause, Bishop Potter and Dr. McVicker⁹ exploited a bit unfairly John Bard’s love of churchly occasions and churchly associations. For the best of reasons and the best of causes, they may have gotten him in over his head financially.”^{10 11} Adjoined to this assertion is the fact that early in the construction of more buildings for the college, the then new finished “Church of Holy Innocents” burned down on St. John’s Day, December 27th, 1858.¹² One would think that the symbolic naming of the day circumstantially circumscribing the caustic conclusion of the construction would have weighed heavily on the man; one would think it would inspire regret. But it was not so. The religiosity moved through our namesake John; “Mr. Bard was determined to rebuild, he of course bearing almost all the expense.”¹³ And so he did —

⁹ This book was published only once, and the spelling error of McVickar to McVicker has been transposed here directly; authority is slim on such subjects as spelling, especially when the text in question is out of print and dialogue.

¹⁰ Ibid, 14

¹¹ “The road to hell is paved with good intentions” — we may add, from the above offered insight, that it’s also gilded with bad credit.

¹² Ibid, 15

¹³ Ibid, 17



The place still stands.

It appears that Mr. Bard is the embodiment of the tripartite agreement and concoction. Having been made title of the place, He is emblem of the old triple sense, and its new counterpart. If the ultimate state of being is found from having walked a path, then it is Mr. Bard's which we are compelled to walk: up and to the line of religious sentiment, which delivers us to the aforementioned "Resplendence" from the horrors of "Regret," which can so easily overcome one here. John Bard was a man of synthesis, endowed when he was with the holy, social, and fiscal posture to transcend his own moment, and be remembered as our central namesake. In 1934, St. Stephen's College changed its name in honor of the man, and his Samaritan nature was thus rewarded: his true ritual actions, acts of dedication to the cause, were received most wholly by time, and he is now faintly recalled by New Englanders when, in awe, they speak: "Bard isn't the same as Barnard?" No, indeed, it is not — and that you forget it is a testament to the overwhelming power of this place's *new* cause.

These initial details, which appear to me so significant when articulated in this fashion¹⁴ — as though they might actually be critical to understanding the course of this college — seem now to be pointedly abstruse, even willfully veiled. Bard’s history is far from relevant to a Bard student! We’re compelled to forget, or simply abandon; in forgetting, we bring to light one of the profounder virtues of the space, and make manifest one of the initial troubles I’ve attempted to talk about in regards to the senior project: our fetishes and fonts are furnished by the dark, and Bard is characteristically obscured by time. If there was no dark, there would be no cause to illuminate; but, even if we bring to light some thing, it will, by the character of this place, and by the simple nature of statistic, likely be forgotten and relegated to another shadowed space, and be a part of the dim history of Bard which it was never in direct conversation with to begin with.

Though for some an illumination does occur, the light is only seen in one room, and touches no paths in the broader fogs. Here perhaps may be a stronger way of speaking the problem: If we want a literary Senior Project to succeed, it has to speak to self and self’s relationship to history, and do so earnestly. History veiled, we are compelled to forget self’s relationship to the past, and thus self becomes a functionary to the present. That present *is* forgetfulness, and the relationship to the past *is* memory. Both are lessons taught (in disparate manners), and we make clear which way we have walked by our final utterances.

AND YET, MOVING ON: It is not to be expected that Bard would stay so singularly non-secular (it being an institution fundamentally a functionary to the present). Through time, Bard has changed into the wonderful institution it is now: our chapels are venues for electronic music and profane performances, Kline’s sacrament is glut, the titular martyr was replaced with a fiscally unwise, though temporally transcendent, time-poet (a more contemporary kind of titular

¹⁴ Pardon this vanity — it may reveal itself in a moment as a critical reflection of the argument which follows here.

martyr), the frost-covered science program produces an illegitimate citizenry, the forests find sprites of indulgence and feature a pagan lilt, and presidents succeed presidents in their ability to recall the financier legacy and join it to the eldritch religious determination as some strange shadow-moral. All things can be hidden, forgotten; we students are conspirators in all these works, and champions of that final lesson.

There is the real virtue in the name — poetry is present, but it is deeper than phonetic trickery: We forget who the name belongs to, and its relationship to the man, if we're not shocked into knowledge. But, in truth, rarely are we shocked into this, or any, knowledge. Novelty evades us, because history — institutionalized history — has a means of conveyance which is aesthetically void. The manufactured textbook and the historically located manuscript have little in common; we are compelled to invest a new kind of aesthetic as a result. Why is anything here supposed difficult, except for the fact that no one expects from the outset to get any of it done? To achieve against expectation is inevitably going to give way to novel sensation (and thus the sensation sought), but it is a tortuous pursuit, a kind of self-flagellation. The latent religiosity today and whole character of our literary community is rooted in our ignorance and ineptitude, and we academics laud those who reveal further just how ignorant we are — “We have learned that what we knew was insufficient; we've been amidst an ignorance all along!” In an inverted manner, we take on the mantle of poets, and follow this new religion, noumena born on newness, newness caused by the consistency of our cataracts. This raises to us the question of how we might take full advantage of our moment, if we haven't even an inkling of the precedent ones which tether to it — but, fundamentally, the answer is *in* our not knowing, and the ignorance bears our novelty with us, we bearing it back, baring it as an ever-turning wheel. We are made machines of perpetual motion, and our churning turns out a dust to thicken the air.

There is perhaps a deep cynicism to this, though it is not uniformly the case for all searches for truth and knowledge that they elicit this image of hierophants babbling at the profundity of their foolishness. The preponderance of ignorance is only one part of the search for knowledge; seen (see?), it itself bears out new insights; and, anyway, my point is that our driving faith is actually found in our maintaining a kind of religious unknown, not one turned outwards, rather one which is ever falling inward.

From a logistic and practical standpoint, we may say that the moral taught has been about evasion, elusion, misapprehension as employable devices, and abjuration as a talent. Our college history, and the inadequacy of our modern reception of it, says so. If this claim seems out of character, allow me to bring into play our school mantra, interior manifesto and brand device — Bard’s motto, that this is “A Place to Think,” is a subtitle which conjures an Arendtian phantom. Another patron saint invoked, we’d do well to think about what this subtitle means, and what it might have meant to her. Fortunately for us, we have access to a deep and extensive catalogue of her phantastic documents, and she lingers as a daemon for the campus, having left her echoes in the Stephenson library for us to recall at a moment’s notice, through the documents which remain in print we can just recall her dusty voice. A thinker herself, surely she’d have something to say on this subject of her grounds?¹⁵

In the second chapter of her essay/book, “Some Questions of Moral Philosophy,” Arendt¹⁶ puts forward a particularly compelling notion, and one which reinforces that evasion

¹⁵ Here also, I must make mention of the fact that Arendt’s personal collection of books, now housed on campus, sits very literally over all printed senior projects, occupying space high in the second floor which is situated directly above these works. All “Bard Writers” whose works are so stored are literally overshadowed by a more valuable thinker — a thinker so important that even the books she once bore are now religious objects, the marginalia she left more prestigious than any conducted research.

¹⁶ Since names have been attended to with a fair amount of consistency, I thought there might be value in putting forward the etymological root of “ARENDDT.” From the surname database, we learn that “This ancient and distinguished surname, recorded in over fifty spellings, is usually of Olde German and Anglo-

might be the key to our ability to perform what this place asks of us. If we are to think in this terrain, it is our duty to attain for ourselves solitude. I take this to be an end of sorts because

To be with myself and to judge by myself is articulated and actualized in the processes of thought, and every thought process is an activity in which I speak with myself about whatever happens to concern me. The mode of existence present in this silent dialogue of myself with myself, I now shall call *solitude*.¹⁷

Naturally following from this are the virtues in abjuration, evasion, hiddenness: “Solitude and its corresponding activity, which is thinking, can be interrupted either by somebody else addressing me or, like every other activity, by doing something else, or by sheer exhaustion.”¹⁸ To prevent the influence of the outside world, and to properly take on this ability, one must learn how to hide from the insidious noise which reverberates around.

More specifically, one must do away with distraction, so as to be able to engage an inner dialogue: “Solitude means that though alone, I am together with somebody (myself, that is). It means that I am two-in-one, whereas loneliness as well as isolation do not know this kind of schism, this inner dichotomy in which I can ask questions of myself and receive answers.”¹⁹ There are obviously caveats presented around this concept, namely that one can experience this “solitude” and “two-in-one” dialogue with another, when engaging with someone with whom

Saxon origins. It derives from a baptismal compound personal name Ernault or Arnolt, of which the elements are "arn", meaning an eagle, and "wald", to rule.¹⁷

Obviously “Arnwald” and “Arendt” don’t bear a one-to-one correspondence; through time, the meaning was warped, hidden. And as if in point of fact, upon our campus bright eagles do not rule, raptors overshadow. Darkness rests upon the laurel heights, and spectres veil the evergreen peaks.

¹⁷ Hannah Arendt, *Responsibility and Judgement* (New York: Random House), 98

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 98

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 98

¹⁷ “Arendt,” <http://www.surnamedb.com/Surname/Arendt#ixzz5CBQ89C6t>

you share interest and parallel internal dialogues. “If I am addressed by one person only,” she states, “and if, as sometimes happens, we begin to talk in the form of a dialogue about the very same things either one of us has been concerned about while still in solitude, then it is as if I now address another self.”²⁰ This interaction is critical, and makes up a new relation, not of solitude, but of something altogether more significant and meaningful: “This other self, *allos authos*, was rightly defined by Aristotle as the friend.”²¹ Only when we are in dialogue with a self, either our own or another, are we well and truly thinking.

Thus, if Bard is “A Place to Think,” it is a place either to attain a hermit’s life or else to gather close select and meaningful friends. And this is where the evasion sets in — likely, there will be far too many attempts at false-friendships,²² and far too few attempts at the ostensibly bleak existential state of a hermitage. In order to rightly think, one must learn how to rightly evade false-friendship, abjure relationships, and obscure one’s self so that it cannot be drawn away from oneself. We could also *attempt* the act of building those true friendships, but the danger in such a pursuit is evident, doubly so for a student, whose life is predicated on the mastery of ritual being. If we are always attempting to think here, we must only attain those fast and true comrades who ennoble through their parallel bearing of self. Those who are images not of self, but ego, are vacuums, and can deviously draw us into a damned state, and a kind of half-

²⁰ Hannah Arendt, *Responsibility and Judgement* (New York: Random House), 98

²¹ *Ibid*, 98

²² The character of the false-friend is one we all know. Such adages as “keep your friends close, and enemies closer,” and “the enemy of my enemy is my friend,” become confused (as anything else might be) when the boundaries are, as they are continually, obscured. What traits my enemy’s enemy possesses are far from bringing them to a state where I could call them companions; and though we have a shared villain between us means nothing about our relationship. It could be the case that my enemy is in fact my friend, as my enemy’s enemy is ten times the terror he’d ever been; my enemy shields me from a more destructive confrontation. And as for keeping enemies close, it is certainly not only for a shield: the friend is someone who can at any point turn upon their heel, and stride directly and abruptly backwards, knife in hand, to deliver the back-stab of a full-front assault, unexpected for their having been a friend. Is this one a false-friend at the point of their wheeling, or in the point of their knife blade breaking back? If the false-friend is thwarted, do we retain them in our memory as friends got lost?

thoughtful space. If we don't take on this lesson, we risk facing loneliness. An odd thought, that people might bring us to it, but as Arendt goes on to discuss, "For this [loneliness] I do not have to be alone: I can be very bored and very lonely in the midst of a crowd, but not in actual solitude, that is, in my own company, or together with a friend, in the sense of another self."²³ Again, if one is to actually attempt thought, and enact the ostensible goal of the land, discernment and discretion are uppermost — to be unable to judge the world, and to be unable to accept remove from it where the virtue of thought is proposed, is a failure of the individual to be as an individual, because it is thought that allows us to maintain, for ourselves, "our selves."

The concern with the self as the ultimate standard of moral conduct exists of course only in solitude. Its demonstrable validity is found in the general formula "It is better to suffer wrong than to do wrong," which, as we saw, rests on the insight that it is better to be at odds with the whole world than, being one, to be at odds with myself. This validity can therefore be maintained only for man insofar as he is a thinking being, needing himself for company for the sake of the thought process.²⁴

This explanation of her perspective furthers the point: if we wish to take to ourselves, and make it properly understood, if we hope to hold ourselves "as the ultimate standard of moral conduct," we must consider that we can achieve this only in solitude. Under the logic that it is "better to be at odds with the whole world than, being one, to be at odds with myself," we see the claim made that self-recognition as a function of thought is our critical apparatus. This does not mean we are meant to be out of communication with the world; far from it: our memories, and our connection to our history is what an education is meant to bring us to.

²³ Hannah Arendt, *Responsibility and Judgement* (New York: Random House), 98

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 100

I have seen such solitude, I have had it brought to me by lived experience. No willful hands showed me the sensation, it was brought by the cold. My history here has been a clawing from “being alone”, into a state of fundamental loneliness, to find the transcendent tones of “solitude.” No foothold offered was sign of anything other than this fact: we are singular in this world. What vestiges had I were lost to time, what home I’d known was thrust back into the memory only.

Arendt returns.

“Thinking and remembering, we said, “is the human way of striking roots, of taking one’s place in the world into which we all arrive as strangers. What we usually call a person or a personality, as distinguished from a mere human being or a nobody, actually grows out of this root-striking process of thinking.”²⁵ The argument, as I see it, is that we are meant to find others, or become removed, to attain a personal moral code, predicated on thought and a relationship with history. This, again, calls for hermitage, or remove; a conversation with the past, or contradictorily, a closing off of oneself.

In broader culture, we consider this removedness opprobrium, so much so that a culture has arisen around inducing a kind of panoptic terror; in many people the “fear of missing out” is a profound driving force, and takes the place of internal thought. The trouble of a societally induced neurosis is evident, but it is doubly negative in the sense that it opposes the basic virtue of the college as institute. It troubles by its neurotic shape, but also by its promoting isolating socialization: in this way, a double negative, the positive result is the yielded insight that the “fomo” too must yet be forgotten, or at least hidden — get it gone, but not too “fogged up,” to quote those people at the window.

²⁵ Hannah Arendt, *Responsibility and Judgement* (New York: Random House), 100

While we're driven to hide by context, In some cases, such "missing out" is punishable by the college: a failure to attend something like a "Senior Colloquium" in the literature department is not only a social but a political offense — insofar as it is both a social and political institution which we are being asked to invest in. In failing to invest, we're implied abandoners, dubbed pariahs.²⁶ Here again, we see that though "thinking" is the proposed aim of the college, "ignorance" is more potently reinforced, in that we are being asked to engage not the solitude fundamental to creating our own thought (which we would assume our artistic and literary endeavors are examples of) but rather the implied loneliness of false society.

This sequence of thought, itself a kind of moral claim about thinking, appears the heart of the matter: if thinking is something which can be achieved only in "solitude," as Arendt defines it, and if this is "A Place to Think," we're morally compelled (both by ourselves and by the institution which upholds these moral ends as political) to abjure; but what we abjure depends entirely upon how deeply we invest in the ultimate spirit of the college, as we're compelled to abjure ourselves on a multitude of levels, some more deep than others, for the sake of that end, which is the attainment of thought.

Gone. The people themselves are phantoms, their records are as slight as mine, with their little black books, and their char-black echoes, ash-filled void-voices. What world of smoke and haze does anyone live in, that it deserved to be so wholly forgotten? Two dorms housed whirlpool, tragedy, and took the names of the broader land: Catskill and Hudson, gone, are now taken by the grounds, their withered worth forgotten. So much forgotten that the fact of their

²⁶ Or — and this is absurd that this (a sidelong-flanking-thrust of a comment, whispered loudly from one stranger to another, so as to appear a subtle trick [and in that manner subtle, for its failing to be so {uttered at an ill-attended late-stage colloquium}] is true) — "shadowy elites"

*being a part of the campus is still easily questioned by anyone who doesn't see the grounds: the place still stands, in campus records, as a part of the map to be explored.*²⁷



Here is where I might step upon a revivable claim, if it be true: we're not asked to be in communication directly with these facts, because we're not learning to be in conversation, we're learning how to hide — it is the effective, religious strategy, and it is put upon us like a weight. Thus we may abjure ourselves from the world, so as to “think”; but we may also be compelled (like our educators) to abjure what world others see, so as to keep them from thinking hard upon us. Put another way, we may shroud our own selves in fogs, or attempt to cast some cloud upon another's brow. This does not seem so far fetched — again, we prize the illusory individual, the conjurer, who can provide us with more shadows on the wall. Return to Bard's history page today: who is highlighted? Neil Gaiman, consummate peddler of fantasy, known for such works

²⁷ <http://www.bard.edu/campus/maps/maptour/view.php?id=100>

as *Neverwhere* and *Sandman*, two books²⁸ pointedly about unrealities. We would be remiss in failing to at least mention Paul de Man's tenure as well, a

²⁸ Regarding Gaiman: his works are more concerned with the veiled than simply these two titles imply. *American Gods*' main character is someone who is able to transcend the old and new realms of divinity (posed as literal old gods of ancient pantheons, and new technological deities) by stepping into the theatrical play-space of the world; this character's name is, fittingly, Shadow. The book *Anansi Boys* (slightly connected back to *American Gods* by a single character, Mr. Nancy) is about two Spider lords who share their heritage with the aforementioned African Spider God.

The book *InterWorld* (a book Gaiman co-wrote with Michael Reaves) features a pantheon, not of known gods, but rather one populated by iterations of the individual Joey Harker, as he has manifested across universes. These universes exist similarly upon spectrums of belief (though this time, not between gods and technology, but "science and magic"), and each one possesses a different solipsistic Harker hero. They come together in their meta-construction outer-outer space, the Nowhere-at-all — resonant, although this is where the intrigue of Gaiman mythology ends. Fitting for a comic-writer, the story devolves into capeshit shenanigans.

That his books are fantasies is certainly not itself indicative of the abjuration drive — fantasy can be an effective rhetorical device for conveying messages about the world — but the fact that there exist cross-over themes between these works (evinced even from the titles) that remain consistent suggests that there really is a lesson in the fiction that this particular individual manufactures.

I'm illustrating myself, this is my ritual. It feels like bloodletting: I come away, drained, scarred. How many days were spent alone, how many meals taken to eat in poorly lit rooms? How many plates of food from Manor — a place the title of which doesn't even imply a history (a Ward against whom, exactly?). Had I taken to my solitude, to enjoy without company? What trend that was, to grab a meal, to take it to a place where I knew no one would be, my own. I'm illustrating myself, this is my ritual.

And if abjuration is the strategy, what might this mean? If thought was to be the outpouring of one's self, the juice concentrate of our meat matter, but only a certain affective kind, such outpouring producing the idea that we are to make ourselves aloof, it seems thought might be the gateway to obscurantism and elitism. There is a trick at hand, and the thoughtful person performs an act of never losing a piece.

Put another way, we have enacted a game: a massive, longform, existential performance of play, subject to rules, punctuated by novel action, and tethered by the simplest kinds of

²⁹ In this long list of alumni, it is worth pointing out that one of the more memetic examples of the college's heroic production was Steely Dan,¹¹ folks who were cut away from the institution for smoking²⁷ dope on campus.³⁷ Fagan, actual student, did end up getting an honorary degree for his ultimate troubles, but this says something just as ridiculous.²⁷

¹¹<http://steelydanreader.com/2006/03/17/back-annandale/>

²⁷ as ggekko88 states in the comment section of the unofficial Youtube posting of "My Old School- Steely Dan- 1973" states, "Steely Dan and Donald Fagen have been misinterpreted as musicians operating in a completely idiosyncratic jazz/blues/pop idiom. They are literary figures and these songs are cinematic short stories that have a Phillip Roth type of sensibility. Brilliant."

binding. We students, all children, inducted intellectuals, are to know whether we failed by our ability to estimate the rules of the game, and by our ability to play within them, so that by the end of the *process* we can say, with confidence, that our gambits payed off, that our tricks were well-received, and that we did not break the rules, but were able to, through them, perform valourous and clever tricks of emergent interaction, such that our final play gave out an...

Ah... — loo... — Eeeeeee... — Ah, ah, ah, ah!

And what memorial is left for the people lost in these doors, who lived in these halls now gone? What message is that, that mine is memorial work? Do I share the burden of recollecting this place with anyone? What souls lost to fog, to fear, to needle (mystic thread), to concrete, to



silence, remain forgotten? This is a desert — why must our work bear the weight of the canticle?

My brain's a bit over-worked to pursue this any further. The assertion stands, this is a fate-full game. A lea, might be, full. We'll return to it. For now, it seems important to point out

the situation of history in this claim. I am in communication with those works which have so deeply affected me that I was in need of bringing their insight to bear in this ritual. For every point I make, I must reinforce the foundations by point and point brought on by other thinkers. This is a warranted “borrowing,” but it may perhaps be another act. In fact, I’m essentially just stealing other people’s ideas (or standing upon the shoulders of giants, wearing these stone plinths thin [I obviously couldn’t achieve this work without words, sentences, ideas, a history of them]). Ultimately, this will yield only as much as it does. There will be no proof of perfection until each audient is accommodated. If this is so, this project will never be complete, as it eternally changes hands (and face). Fitting: I’ll defer to a quote, a favorite of mine.

For small erections may be finished by their first architects; grand ones, true ones, ever leave the copestone to posterity. God keep me from ever completing anything. This whole book is but a draught—nay, but the draught of a draught. Oh, Time, Strength, Cash³⁰, and Patience!³¹

On this leviathan’s back I’ll say I have as defense the claim that this is all that’s done, complete in that it is handed in as a final product of a kind (its character of completion is one superimposed by the banality of expectation); there is no claim to its found-out nature of done-being, save eyes upon it; all claims to such precedent character of being undone are undone, let them be the last furnishings of the aforementioned finishedness. It is seen, and so is furnished for the eyes; it is received, is at hand, in hands.

But that is a philosophic “completeness”. Nothing is ever truly done until it dies. Is this so impotent that when noticed it crumbles? *I* can’t kill a project, although it may gasp for breath,

³⁰ Melville may have asked for four things, but cash ultimately was king — money doesn’t buy happiness, but it does buy whey protein and a gym membership, thus paving the way to Strength; buys one freedom from necessity and labor, and thus time; through that, gives one leisure, and is an assurance of patience.

³¹ Herman Melville, *Moby Dick*. (Penguin Books, New York), 157

having been inadequately aired. Here, the more realistic question of “completeness” interacts only with the claim to an argument, as the generally understood consensus about these literary projects is that they must possess a good argument, in order that properly receive “good” credit. This leads one to conclude that they must simply make an argument about something — if seen as having made a claim, is the argument not sufficient in itself? Proof to whom is sound? If one has to make an argument, one is primed to ask, what does it mean for an argument to be good? Beauty is in the eye of its bearer, and the handler of the claim whips and cracks against the product, whips it into a shape they’re ready to receive. The whole domain of the answer to such a question of completeness is thus obviously round-and-rounded, and thus any reader will know that an argument, to be of quality, must simply persuade — it needn’t be right, true, accurate, or factual. And so, this said, we may say we have the element of “completeness” for a senior project articulated: it must be convincing.

We must then consider, if we’re to understand this — that is, what I’ve writ here (as, above — so, below) — as a literature project, what precisely I’m to do my convincing about. Ostensibly, the argument is meant to be one made about “literature”; but it seems like we may take too easily the definition of such a thing for granted.

So let us consider the definition and etymology of this word, to make totally certain that what I’m to discuss is as cleanly understood as is possible, so that no one could come along and convince in the opposite direction about any topic I choose to follow through it.

early 15c., “book-learning,” from Latin *literatura/litteratura* “learning, a writing, grammar,” originally “writing formed with letters,” from

litera/littera "alphabetic letter" also "an epistle, writing, document;
 literature, great books; science, learning"³²

The sense of literature today, we blindly assume, addresses only the book. When we think of an individual who studies literature, or who has accepted the cultural responsibility of a "literature degree," we make no account of the "learning," and assume "writing" and "grammar" only implied, those singular technologies capable of imparting a "learning;" which is to say, the "alphabetic letter" referenced in *literatura's* root, *litera*, is all we tend to say with the word. But writing underpins almost every aspect of our society, and to craft any intellectual learning of the world, we do so through word. To understand the car, we either have our faded uncles³³ show us the interior, or we read the lettered contents of the owner's manual — though it is not conventional to consider it thusly, is this manual not a work of literature? In every sense it attends to the etymology and definition of the word.

It's important to make this translation for the academy, and for the world: we do not live in a world eminently literate, nor is there cause to think our words are ever really read today. Paper used to imply words, now proposes only pictures. A sad fact; But mediums change, and their messages with them. I don't massage the old form for this, it's dying; instead, indeed, I attend to new literature. Our times are changing.

This is one new lesson: history and its meaning is borne by the shape of things. This project responds to the shape of its game, and so, the lack of any formal governance put forward by the institution to which I return this project indicates that such freeform re-articulation of terms (found here within the act of equating games, play, and our locale's "interpreted history,"

³²"Literature (n.)." <https://www.etymonline.com/word/literature>

³³ I implore you to address to me any uncle you have who couldn't be described in some manner, slant or direct, as a "faded" being. If not faded in mind, surely in flannel; if not in flannel, surely in relevance; if not in relevance, surely is disposition; if not in disposition, surely in something.

with literature) is not only not an issue, but is in fact patently acceptable, perhaps even palatable. So, allow this to be another gambit: I'll play the word-game.

AND, AND, AND! As I choose my own audience to receive and judge this work, I construct not only the terms herein, but also the terms of my own engagement. If I'm clever enough — or have been clever enough — to choose professors who either aren't discerning, who just don't give a damn, or who are in agreement with the sophistry writ here, I've nothing to fear when the hour of judgement comes. Certainly I wouldn't deign to assign to myself fools, as my grammar, ever faulty, needs repeated and re-repeated rigidification; nor would I consider the professors about me as anything but my superiors, intellectual and administrative.

However, some, I'm sure, have better senses of humor than others. As I cannot rely on a lack of taste or ambition in people who have succeeded beyond me, all I can hope for is that those who look upon this see the absurdity here as a feature, not a failure. Should such peoples be drawn to judge, I will have secured another safeguard against defenestration. I am my harshest critic, so they say: from this, it follows that my assessors are a bulwark. Allow this to be the flourish, a dance of the chance-act, last chance at the play-dance; I take myself to promenade.

I will no doubt pull up to the gates of final assessment, and will have already bounded past each hurdle without hurt. What a humorous display it would be, to come up to the ending of this sequence of gambits, only to be dashed upon the heavy glass doors, invisible sign of the trap, hidden parameters I'd failed to factor in, which...!

I challenge, in my examiners, the latent humanity which they all presumably possess. What grey dawn must you wake to, consummate interlocutors, to deny my concerns a place in the ritual shelves? As these projects are often little else but the dusting away of presentiment from the creators' personality writ tiny; such dusting of cobwebs from the petty crystalline

nodules of gross accumulated attention paid to this or that insignificance is thus deemed adequate: thus I ask: is there any a one less soundly shaped than this which now sits before you, which gained right to sit amongst psychic giants by virtue of its own spiritual and humane attunement to its creator; and is any one a more bespoke charm than this?

If this should fail to convince — if merit or meandering cannot compel — I fall back upon the fact that this work, in context, is surely slightly strange, and through this feature attractive and compelling enough to be given passage. I suspect it is not as singular as I desire, and the defense for its right to be considered worthy for inclusion in the fabled and inverted paper-pantheon of the Bardly vaults is not alone made on the merits of its newness, but through this quality the place it's owed is again defended, not in total, but in places where it surely counts.

If, this work fails to make sense — that is, if I leave you with a sense of discomfort and dissatisfaction, either through my particular words (weak or wrought heavy), or else with the performance put forward, I leave that firmly in your hands. I am here to abrade. Who, well-minded, is not? I am here to make waves — the tide in the pool has whirled the world, and drags us all nauseatingly and unknowingly into void — in this, our naive natatorium, Above all — and you can leave off here if it suits you, all has been explained in detail — if this appears a petulant work, bear this in mind: games are for children.³⁴

³⁴ Signed, AA

Signed, HH

Signed, JB

Signed, JB

The Dying Flame

In research and preparation for this project, I came upon two pieces of apocrypha in the basement of the Stephenson Library. One of these was a letter from a distant lover, slipped into a copy of McLuhan's *Understanding Media*; the other was a poetic proem shoved between two miscellaneous senior projects in the vaults. I've transcribed the two of them here, because I feel that they seem to echo some valuable aspects of my initial observations: they speak to history forgotten, and the quality of this place; furthermore, they seem to suggest a concerted and consistent spirit throughout the campus, and reinforce the concept that I am not alone haunted by these sentiments, though I am now their particular channel and voice. That the two were by time shadowed speaks wonders to my thesis claim: an education through this game is one which

reinforces obscurity — and what could be more obscure than apocrypha of apocrypha of apocrypha, records on records in records?

WEST BADEN COLLEGE
West Baden Springs
Indiana

July 19th, 1951

Dear Obie,

What the devil is the matter with you? Why haven't you written to me? Nothing at all except a cryptic postcard at Christmas asking for prayers and not a blessed thing since; I am supposing in my charity that you are paralysed. No less a malady, I tell myself, could explain this sepulchral silence. I am at Baden again as you see. Still trying to finish that awful thesis. It is finally moving though, and I hope to have it in shape by the first of next month. Then I shall leave here for a few days at Bula, Wisconsin before going to St. Mary's for theology. You may know that Gus is to go to Wisconsin for theology. I think you will see him in New York some time before the last of August. Pat was assigned to Alma, but he is trying to have the order rescinded because of his mother. Mike is finishing his doctoral work at St. Louis this summer. I am looking forward to seeing him there around the fifteenth. How are things going with you, Obie? Second year should have been a triumph. The little boys should really go for those muscles of yours. But of course it is that kind simple heart that should grapple them to you with hoops of steel. (Hamlet, of course.) Let me hear from you when you can.

Ever yours affectionately,

DIN

Some remarks:

Our “DIN” may be seen as a distraction; the insert may be seen as noise. If I’ve failed to make the argument indirectly, let me speak it again, directly, here: form is function always, and there’s a lesson in it.

The concern with theology, media, and the carried weight of it is echoed in past ages. There is something terrifying (though ever true) about the fact that I know none of these people for their undergraduate work, not Gus, nor Pat, nor Mike, nor Obie (all lost except DIN, whose is ubiquitous across time; the writers of our letters fall into one massive grey “author”; Obie’s hand is felt only as a zeitgeist gesture into aged pages).

I should state also that there is something to the fact of this letter having remained so closely in the folds of a work of Mcluhan’s. DIN’s and Mcluhan’s words have a firmer and longer lasting relationship to one another than even Bard’s College had to Columbia. A sorry

thought, but Obie offers up a gift of history, and seems also to raise a sordid question: Why would a theologic DIN have any relationship with our Obie, a student to the forms of our media, except to find if in the shape of tools³⁵ and relationships we may see some static image of a total God? If this is the drive towards reading such a book (a drive I've with literary intuition evinced), then it seems possible that even 70 years ago the religious sentiment, untarnished, was still rolling around the campus. However, I take the fact of this undisturbed letter as a sign that it was precisely in Obie's hands that Bard's religiosity truly died. It's the only manuscript record we have to go on. Barring other exact evidence, I regard this relic as signifier of the turning point.

We can see the unseen throughout, as well. The language speaks a darkness; DIN brings out a demon. "What the devil is the matter with you," she wrote, and in the claim asked where the horny beast sat within old Obie (we know it to be at Obie's breast, the heart of darkness a seat for sins). "Why haven't you written me?" DIN asked— we see it here, obscurantism moves our man; the phantom casts its shadow over his core; mayhaps it is the case that Obie is seeing, hearing other DINs closer at hand — too much distraction in the shaded woods, no time to write. And what little did he send his beloved, what sound? Nothing but a "cryptic postcard," as if to say *I'll play along, but only darkly*. An echo anyway, an echo anyway; Obie is playfully assumed "paralysed," the cryptic cards and silence thereafter suggest "sepulchral silence". Fitting; and for the future apocrypha, frightening. A darkness indeed! And, found in McLuhan: If the medium is the message, *I'm* embodying the state of things: Here, message is medium, and I'm spirited by it! Obie, Obie, Obie is not the question ("(Hamlet, of course.)"! An echo anyway, an echo anyway. How clinical is our man?

³⁵ Obie being nothing but.

The question: what does it mean? If truly only Obie, I'm at a loss for words. I provide a DIN to you, but the connection's otherwise dead. A monotonous tone; warm buzz from my receiver(s). Give back the time, I'm living in twilight!

"Let me hear from you when you can," DIN softly implores. "Obie, gee, Y/N?" And in response, a silence; professional at work.³⁶

Ultimately, a distressing distraction, that. I offer the following as what appeared to be a more coherent document scrawled on what felt like tissue paper (a sign perhaps of the writing's nature as bodily excretion only?). This was certainly a bookmark, but not in the sense that the last letter was as a keeper of pages. No: this leaf seemed to sign the state of things it touched, directly. No coy reading here, as always, it speaks itself:

*This work is the relic of a ludicrous transcendence, the
culminating Objét which forms the cap(dunce)stone to the long-
form ritual of THE: "An Education."
After, whispered, self and soul, I hoist above me, there,
Annunciation
Let the light of day gleam through it briefly,
Touch first flame to last, and then carry it into the roots of
Academy, where it is to remain a thing interred.
This, a
Recording and re-articulation of some greater works,
Thus catalogued (as a cataloguing! Circles in circles!)
And forgotten within the grime foundations, much like the rest,
To speak the disembodied voice of a miner's work.
Speak: such a creation and inhumation is a mistake —
The work undoes itself, enters life with a foot in the grave —
Its apotheosis is its day of total dark —*

³⁶ There's actually little reason to believe these people are lovers at all; if anything, it seems this letter has only mild flirtatious undertones, if one reads with an eye towards such things. It is, however, far more intriguing to read intrigue into it.

*But this retaliation would miss the point:
 The homunculus' shape is its duty, the fact of its shaping is its goal
 It teaches the world of itself, and cries a muted cry, raps upon the
 Glass and scrawls there on the fog of breath its symbols,
 That we might come and see the bounding shape of the bottle, be
 Aware of the binding and entrapped man, and know the technic
 fire Within the chalk-white breast that fueled the scrawl.
 The diminutive creature attracts with movement, not its song
 That universe ever stands alone, though it draws its light from
 Every corner
 And its dance, would will people to the vault-like chamber where
 Its brothers' bodies too cry still
 Wonder: what impelled vivisepture?
 The form is the function! echo with action that little man left
 Behind,
 Toy with unearthed bones, to read their auguries; and from them,
 Perceive projected messages
 Intuit new hieroglyphs to scratch upon the mausoleum walls.
 Each word written is an epitaph of the moment.
 Their ossian textures upon the cracked stone recall the bodies from
 Whom the inspiration comes
 Bards, poets, intellects, with their own crumbling remains, send
 Upwards their distant voices, and indeed a miracle is performed as
 Those voices fill the head and guide the hand with a multitude
 Disparate wills.
 Heroic phantoms: Come to aid! Inflect the course! Offer that light
 Which showed your way, and make mine!*

I will freely admit that this document has been a singularly affecting one; of all the things I've read this year, it may be that this flitting piece of paper was the one which most strongly affected my sensibilities and productions. Upon receiving this from the vaults, I found I shed a single, crystalline tear, which seemed profoundly solid while it fell, but splashed upon the ground with the expected weight that a dot of water would have.

I've found that I've been inclined to echo this work with a pressing consistency; there must have been some matter within it with which I have an affinity. The language strikes me as dated (though not dated in the Obie/DIN sense; there's a coupling, but between myself and time) — this language has the affect of some tired soul who has yet seen something, has been made

tired by the sight. The line, “THE: An Education,” suggests to me a snide understanding of what has been offered to the author, and the determiner “THE” so emphatically capitalized suggests also a kind of disdain for the false attempts at value such a determineer and commandeering result which such would give.

The form, frantic and frenetic, seems to say what has been consistently familiar, and restates the discomfort in a way we academics in our towers might understand, without recourse direct to rabble (though this may have been). Its obscurity is in conversation, is like any tension discussed thus far, and gives the game back to an unknown actor.

The First: the Same

The claim throughout these pages, that “this is just a game, man!” implies both that I’m little more than a sniveling boy (snotgreen, shot through; bile child; childe, wild), and that there is some element of play manifesting in the education received here.

the nature of the word and concept of “Play” seems rooted in its formulation as a distinct construction of language. This persona was meant to serve as such an example. This idea was in need of atypical application — to suggest that something or someone is “at play,” or “is playing,” without broader context, implies almost nothing about gesture or action; here seen, the word functions, across examples, uniformly only as a description of some behavior which is ill-understood and which is possessive of levity. Because this word is at once seemingly well-understood (in that, should something be described as play or game, most would understand the claim), and yet without parallel application (in that, though all things can be this way described, but yet needn’t share near anything in common), it is a concept which deserves some delving into. Fortunately, there are already authors who have gone to effective lengths to determine the precise nature of the concept, and so it is through them that this meditation upon the word will be mediated.

I. An Argument

II

One plays only if and when one wishes to. In this sense, play is free activity. It is also uncertain activity. Doubt must remain until the end, and hinges upon the denouement.³⁷

PLAY's the claim: we would do well to discuss the *real meaning* of the word; in talking about it at serious length and depth, it seems only right to refer to those writers who have put more aptly forward their own typologies, and to employ the set of terms which have already been devised, so as to eliminate any excess confusion. Roger Caillois, in his book *Man, Play and Games*, articulates a framework by which we may understand games. This framework, which I will reprint and address in some detail here, will function as a simple primer and basic guide both to games generally, and to the way in which they are made sense of by but one intellectual who has made attempts at offering definition.

This said, the initial features of play given by Caillois, while helpful in giving voice to a concept ill-understood,³⁸ tend towards contradiction in ways not immediately obvious. These elements of contradiction, which I will attempt to point out as they arise, are not uncommon in such discussions - in fact, the contradictions which arise in definition will be critical to understanding what is one of the most potent qualities of play: it is a wheeling thing, obvious only to the eye that sees it, its presence easily blotted by some outside insight or else by chance seen where it otherwise might not have been. Within this essay — and through its particular form which it shares with the anthropological, psychological, and etymological essays³⁹ which it has addressed — we might see play itself manifest critically; in this performance of play, wherein

³⁷ Roger Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*, (Urbana, IL: U of Illinois, 2001), 7

³⁸ "Ill" as a determiner has confused me. It has the double, near contradictory, meanings of both soundness and not soundness. A man may be mentally ill, but perform in his illness an absolutely ill feat, and impress with his illness, because of his illness, despite his illness. I use it here to say both. It leaves me feeling ill.

³⁹ Attempts, all — and while it's true I'm in conversation with essays, books, chapters and such, I do mean it here to be the try, try, try

point and counterpoint arise frequently, we may learn of the profound significance play has. Each instant of fact toppling fact brings the inquiry to a higher place, and indicates the critical movement of play, which is upwards. Play has a telos, and its end is indeed high, though we consider it and its stakes lowly. In speaking thusly (at the end), my goal is to foster in you, my reader, an eye for double-speaking, and the critical role of such reeling. This is my game^{40,41} however, together, we may step into a thorny knot.⁴²

But, I step beyond myself with too great a haste, and too quickly attempt a closed conclusion: let us simply, by way of Caillois' words, understand a basic first image of play - we may build higher after the basic blocks are set.

(...) analysis permits play to be defined as an activity which is essentially:

1. Free: in which playing is not obligatory; if it were, it would at once lose its attractive and joyous quality as diversion;
2. Separate: circumscribed within limits of space and time, defined and fixed in advance;
3. Uncertain: the course of which cannot be determined, nor the result attained beforehand, and some latitude for innovations being left to the player's initiative;
4. Unproductive: creating neither goods, nor wealth, nor new elements of any kind; and, except for the exchange of property among the players, ending in a situation identical to that prevailing at the beginning of the game;

⁴⁰ This is *my* game

⁴¹ Its nothnk' personnel

⁴² kid

5. Governed by rules: under conventions that suspend ordinary laws, and for the moment establish new legislation, which alone counts;
6. Make-believe: accompanied by a special awareness of a second reality or of a free unreality, as against real life.

These diverse qualities are purely formal. They do not prejudice the content of games. Also, the fact that the two last qualities— rules and make-believe— may be related, shows that the intimate nature of the facts that they seek to define implies, perhaps requires, that the latter in their turn be subdivided.⁴³

The preceding six “essential” qualities of play are said to be “purely formal,” and “do not prejudice the content of games;” however, we may assert with relative certainty that, were this true — that is, were they strictly formal qualities, and accurate to all games, being reflective of their true “essence” — then we would have a relative understanding of every game that has ever been, as they would all with ease be described as bearing all six of the above qualities without question. But this is not the case. Close examination of even the most obvious games will bear out examples which counter these definitions, and muddy a distinct notion of play, or else make play far more ubiquitous and distinctly present than the definition above suggests.

I.II

Let us not break down the trouble of “play” being defined in terms of games (obviously, the phrase “analysis permits play to be defined” is followed by definitions, and then the statement that these definitions “do not prejudice the content of games,” poses to us a problem: either play is contained in games [“as these diverse qualities” “do not prejudice the content of

⁴³Roger Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*, (Urbana, IL: U of Illinois, 2001), 10-11

games,” these qualities {in their lack of prejudgement} are qualities of game *contents*, which is to say, play], or else *is* games [water takes the shape of its vessel, and play the order of its game; the nebulous nature of them both shocks the system and defies sense in other ways than superficial definition alone, so who’s to say that even this facile facsimile is sufficient to afford these forms a solid binding fare to fit the terms as one wound fardel?]; because the distinction is unclear, we are left to assume only the former [though greater wisdom would certainly be born by the inquiry {which, put rudimentarily, would be, “is play games?” - the answer being, they emerge from each other, play yielding of and to games, games yielding of and to play}]) as it fails to yield to the game at hand, which rather drives us towards the incongruity of the preceding terminology. Simply put, play needn’t possess all six of these aforementioned characteristics, and we find that play exists even where only one or two features of the above definition are present. It would suffice to untether one aspect, and from there proceed to say that the exception of the one facet of definition indicates the exception of them all, but to be thoroughly academic I will address the list in total before moving on to the more fundamental and worthwhile schema Caillois aims to put forward - should that be a more enticing excavation to you, I point you towards I.III.

SOOooOooo:

I.II.I Play is Free

This is a curious articulation, as it asserts a definite understanding of the human will as in some way *actually willful*, and not simply borne by circumstance — we may say play is free only if we assumed that *will* is free, a question which for many is still up for debate.⁴⁴ This aspect implies an agency in the actors of the game; this agency is, unfortunately, something I fear we are not able to in good faith take for granted. I will leave the task of finding a definitive answer

⁴⁴ See: Calvinism

to the question of free-will to philosophers of mind, and theorizers who work in different circles than this — for now, simply highlighting the existence of the question of “will,” and the lack of freedom therein, should suffice in pushing the boundaries of Caillois’ definition.

However, for the sake of an argument, and an entertaining segue, if we conceive of freedom slightly differently, the notion of play as a “free” enterprise becomes somewhat more manageable. Instead of assuming freedom implies “free will,” we may conceive of it as implying “freedom from” something or other. Johan Huizinga asserts just this kind of liberation in *Homo Ludens*. “Play can be deferred or suspended at any time. It is never imposed by physical necessity or moral duty. It is never a task. It is done at leisure, during ‘free time’.”⁴⁵ Here, the freedom which play implies is a freedom from “physical necessity or moral duty.” This exemption is sufficient to at least make Caillois’ argument accurate.

It is valuable, while on this path, to continue down the detour which has been offered by the presence of the word “leisure” in the previous articulation. By following it, and seeing how “freedom from work” implies the relevance of this inclusion will be obvious

The word “school” has a curious history behind it. Meaning originally “leisure” it has now acquired precisely the opposite sense of systematic work and training, as civilization restricted the free disposal of the young man’s free time more and more and herded larger and larger classes of the young to a daily life of severe application from childhood onwards.⁴⁶

What school has become, a “severe application” of the self towards society, is an almost precise abandonment and inversion of its initial sense. What school had once meant, a construction of a kind of play, is now anything but. What may we even do with such a thought?

⁴⁵ Johan Huizinga. *Homo Ludens*. (London Etc: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1949), 8

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 148

Detour noted, and trod down slightly, we are at least given a kind of freedom which allows us to understand Caillois — whether we understand him *honestly* or not is a question of definition (which rests on our own indefinite state), and to fall further into such circles may be unwise, but we have at least unpacked a certain kind of freedom which has pressed against Caillois’ definition, and one which has aligned comfortably with it. Such freedoms of interpretation afford us the chance to move on, as both sides, for and against the quality, have been considered equally enough to suggest a balance in terms. Let us move on with the definitions: that play occurs during “free time” moves us into the next quality of play, its separateness.

I.II.II Play is Separate

Play’s separateness is important, but to assume it is a given is unwise, and not unlike the term which precedes here. It is comfortable to conceive of the magic-circle as a thing ritual and apart, but great wisdom has been asserted about such spheres being fundamentally “a part of the world,” not “apart from it.” The question is one of thresholds — to enter a game, we must move beyond our own space, and into a new one. But this alone does not suffice: does the threshold bear the qualities of the game, or the world; or is the warp of the way a weaving of the two?

Konstantin Stanislavsky, the renowned Russian theatre practitioner, wrote once in a letter to his maintenance and non-acting staff on the significant interconnectedness of play with the real world. To them, and with wisdom, he wrote that: “you are our colleagues in creating productions. Our Art Theatre differs from many other theatres in that its performance begins the moment people enter the theatre building.”⁴⁷ Where we might think play as being of a world outside our own, Stanislavski perceived that it was fundamentally connected, and that the act of

⁴⁷ Konstantin Stanislavsky (edited and translated by Laurence Senelick), *Stanislavsky - A Life in Letters* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 573

moving into the play-sphere was itself ritual, and integral to making that space — the passing of a threshold then was a part of the play. If this is so, it's difficult to say where that game stops, or where it truly has begun — since the threshold connects the inner world of the game with the outer world, does that playful connection suggest something fundamentally play-ful about the world outside the play-sphere? As an audient, I go to the theatre and invest myself in the dark room so as to experience the ritual of performance in its own time, but my conception of what happens on stage is as much affected by the coat-room performance as it is by the uneasy performance of my hands along my uneven and untied shoelaces, and each innocuous though memorable experience which precedes the acquisition of the threshold. We do not begin again at each new circle, and while it certainly is pleasing psychologically to think as much, we would gain a greater wisdom than even Stanislavski had carried if we came to see every sphere as fundamentally interconnected. Here, Huizinga rears again:

The player who trespasses against the rules or ignores them is a “spoilsport”. The spoilsport is not the same as the false player, the cheat; for the latter pretends to be playing the game and, on the face of it, still acknowledges the magic circle.⁴⁸

Huizinga speaks truly - the spoilsport is a petulant individual, whose actions seem to mar the salt-line of the magic-circle, and ruin the internal world. “He robs play of its illusion - a pregnant word which means literally ‘in-play’ (from *inlusio*, *illudere* or *inludere*).”⁴⁹(11) He who shouts “fire” from a balcony is as much a sport-spoiler as the boy who runs from the ball-court with the ball - both undo the boundaries, and wreck the play. But manifest in the petulant behavior is a precociousness which seems unavoidable — “life is a game,” says the child, pithy

⁴⁸ Johan Huizinga. *Homo Ludens*. (London Etc: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1949), 11

⁴⁹ Ibid, 11

and absurd in a moment; one might assume the magic that sits in the circle is diffused into the world and made impotent — far more likely is it that the magic of the world, so ubiquitous and straining, whelms the contents of the play-sphere so totally that it all at first seems broken, not vitalized by grander integration.

I.II.III Play is uncertain

The most evident truth in this list, and the most quickly accepted. If play is certain, that is, with an obviously definable outcome, it ceases to be play. A diminution of spontaneity reduces play to performance, and while these two may be closely linked, they are not the same (as far as I can tell, anyhow). This, we can leave unspoilt.

I.II.IV Play is Unproductive

The book *Games People Play* - a popular psychology text, perhaps outside the realm of literary inquiry except for the fact that *I say otherwise* — written by Eric Berne, offers the profound insight that, in fact, people engage in games subconsciously, unwittingly, for legitimate inter- and extra- personal gain, and for certain definable and productive ends in the real world. Of course, it would be dishonest of me to mention this text, a *book built around the premise of a kind of productive play*, without looking towards his definition of games, to see where his play and Caillois' differ.

Fortunately for us, Berne makes the task easy — Chapter 5, entitled “Games,” begins with a definition:

A GAME is an ongoing series of complementary ulterior transactions progressing to a well-defined, predictable outcome. Descriptively it is a recurring set of transactions, often repetitious, superficially plausible,

with a concealed motivation; or, more colloquially, a series of moves with a snare, or “gimmick.” Games are clearly differentiated by two chief characteristics: (1) their ulterior quality and (2) their payoff. Procedures may be successful, rituals effective, and pastimes profitable, but all of them are by definition candid; they may involve contest, but not conflict, and the ending may be sensational, but it is not dramatic. Every game, on the other hand, is basically dishonest, and the outcome has a dramatic, as distinct from merely exciting, quality.⁵⁰

The “predictable outcome” in Berne’s definition might be cause for the reader to point back to the previous category, that being the definite quality of play’s uncertainty, and gleefully exclaim that the author of this meditation is in blatant error. It is the weak-minded reader who concludes thusly, but we must always address the weak links in the chain, if we wish it to hold fast.

What is here referred to as “predictable” is not the definite outcome, simply that there definitely is one. We could interpret it otherwise and assume that by “predictable outcome” Berne meant to suggest that games lack a spontaneous quality, but this again runs counter to some shapes of play which we’ve been working with. For play to align with this closed framework, we must assume “predictable” implies only the end of a scenario. That said, if we accept a broader framework, we could reconcile both definitions — that of bearing an end, and that of an easily determined end — in the idea that play is a roiling mass of indiscreet definitions which shift and mesh as and when necessary. Play, being as much a state of child-like attunement as childish derailment, is a shapeless and yet shaped thing in definition and statement. Observe, this is so, as a game is a “recurring set of transactions” which are “clearly

⁵⁰ Eric Berne, *Games People Play: The Psychology of Human Relationships*. (Brattleboro: the Book Press, 1964), 48

differentiated by two chief characteristics.” the first quality, their “ulterior” nature, seems to refer to the hidden motives they imply in the players, but if considered slantwise construes a hidden meaning manifest in the word itself — “games” as a word bears a veiled meaning just as it does as a structure.

While this is a description of the game as it is understood within transactional analysis (the school of psychology within which that book works) there is enough parallel language and inverted meaning to think that the conclusion about muddy language and play are deeply related. The concept of a totalizing typology is disappearing — in its stead is a more totalizing notion. For now, we move onward, as there is more play to unpack.

Within this search for “productive” play, the related question of professional games, and regimented play for sport, must be raised: if one plays for money, if one is paid to play, does the act of play stop being such since it has been thrust into a productive state? If we reject Berne’s analysis (which we would do at great peril), it does perhaps move into a realm where we can say it isn’t play; but the thrust then happens to come from the fact that there is still some governing quality; the super-fan and the athlete would not hesitate to call the game “real-life,” but there is something which sits underneath, which yet allows games to be deemed play.

I.II.V *Play is Governed by Rules*

We can understand this as a truth, certainly, and we may do well to analyse it as a fact; But is it rather that *games* are governed by rules? Maybe so, sophistic mitigant, but such characteristics are rolling still - the spinnin’ signs and symbols are a-left a-whirrin’, a-right? We will address this distinction, or rather progression from play into games, with Caillois’ proceeding typology - the fleshy heart is not yet unveiled; as yet we’re merely scratching skin.

I.II.VI *Play is make-believe*

Play is make-believe insofar as... Well, it is, and it isn't; except, (and this is important), this import, an 'is', is important, and is an import of the product of the import brought to my ports, ported outwards; thus to speak it to you I give import to the importance of what has been imported to me, which is that "Play is make-believe insofar as... Well, it is, and it isn't; except, (and this is important), this import, an 'is', is important, and is an import of the product of the import brought to my ports, ported outwards; thus to speak it to you I give import to the importance of what has been imported to me, which is that..."

The preceding dismantling should make obvious the idea that play, properly understood, requires us to do away with certain elements of Caillois' qualifiers. Of the preceding six qualities, only two seem truly steadfast: that play is uncertain and governed by rules. With that said, though, there have also been certain examples which would contradict even these two "truths" — what seems truer than play's easily purchased definition is that it... What seems most probable is that play bears — thought tends to untether structure, but perhaps this untethering in its playful formulation (agonistic, or perhaps antagonistic; polemical besides) highlights play most truthfully. Certainly play bears some relationship to formal construction, so it is very probable that the act of pushing on boundaries suggests it; in fact, it may be that acting around the boundaries of any system, fateful or fit-fulfilling, is what comes to define the thing. A game is actually governed not by the superposition of rules upon the actors, but rather what the actors will do with their sense of implied rules. Whatever this is, is appropriate, and the most fitting work of all. There is no transcendence of the game; one cannot outwit oneself.

I.III

That preceding knot of naughts is far too wrought with ends to sort out some single truth on play. Examining any book which analyses play's character seems to find that play persists

from every side, and exists wherever a language of play is determined to be developed — little else am I certain of, where play's above definition is concerned. The ubiquity of play seems simply to arise from the fact that it is seen wherever an enlightened founder looks. There is something to be said for such levity, but the profundity of such an assertion inspires only so much effective analytic thought — the lightness of the thought seems to reveal and remove the obscure depth that was being invoked above. Caillois' definition of "play" may have been weak in standing against illumination, but it does not mean it was without weight — it is not so much a cleaved chasm as a real furrowed knot — furthermore, his book is still valuable, for he has set up for us a typology more analytic and grounded. Within the chapter "The Classification of Games," a system more exacting is devised to understand, not play, but games, and their types. While still bogged by language which is itself too light to enact a strict science of play, I believe there are significantly more valuable tools put forward. It is the case that Caillois asserts that he does "not intend, in resorting to these strange concepts, to set up some kind of pedantic, totally meaningless mythology;"⁵¹ but I have already placed a significant amount of faith in the ideas, so a mythology they shall be for the sake of argument. But where a literalist misunderstands a flood, and turns world history into a biblical allegory, I will not so step. Though this is a mythology, it is one to be interpreted as conceptual, not "correct;" thus with a slight re-working of Caillois' terms, I believe we may come to devise a more sophisticated understanding of games, and through that gain some intuition on what play is. This conclusion about play, one which these writers dance around but fail to address directly, shall then be more easily revealed. Though play and games are, as we have seen, clearly constructions of language, they do seem to imply *something*. What that something is, I hope to more accurately convey here.

I.III.I

⁵¹ Roger Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*, (Urbana, IL: U of Illinois, 2001), 13

Ilinx. The last kind of game includes those which are based on the pursuit of vertigo and which consist of an attempt to momentarily destroy the stability of perception and inflict a kind of voluptuous panic upon an otherwise lucid mind. In all cases, it is a question of surrendering to a kind of spasm, seizure, or shock which destroys reality with sovereign brusqueness.⁵²

It is valuable to *begin at the end*, as an argumentative tool and as a way to outline what case is actually, fundamentally, being put forward. Like the sublime, ilinx is something which springs from unknowns. It is the whirlpool, and the vertiginous tilt. The “last kind of game” is that which mounts into the destruction of “the stability of perception;” and while Caillois is directly referring to acts which destroy physical perceptions, such as drinking alcohol or doing drugs (the name itself, Greek for ‘whirlpool,’ being a reference to the disorientation which comes from spinning about until one’s inner-ear fluid has wound itself up into ilinx), I believe most games — as we are familiar with them — produce a kind of intellectual disorientation: The unknown of the football match is a disorienting state, the game concludes to order and removes the unknown; the chess game is again the same; every game with an end fundamentally unknown implies a state of disorientation as both sides in the conflict make attempts at removing the ilinx, subduing its novelty for the final case, and concluding themselves, through the proof of their mastery, to be the victor. All of the following definitions will wheel back into ilinx, ultimately, and so it is important that it be understood as the true central element of the game.

All games induce that “surrendering to a kind of spasm, seizure, or shock which destroys reality;” we can see it in the elated reaction of every success with which we resonate, be it on the pitch or in the parlor.

⁵² Ibid, 23

I.III.II

All things we seek give way to unknowns, and any game is a search, an attainment by some kind of strategy, intentional or otherwise, to find the whirling.

A lea. This is the Latin name for the game of dice. I have borrowed it to designate, in contrast to agon, all games that are based on a decision independent of the player, an outcome over which he has no control, and in which winning is the result of fate rather than triumphing over an adversary. More properly, destiny is the sole artisan of victory, and where there is rivalry, what is meant is that the winner has been more favored by fortune than the loser.⁵³

So it is with chance, “alea” — when one attains their winning as “the result of fate,” one feels the profound connection to what was at points before only a possibility; perhaps not even that possibility felt, odds so stacked that the player feels their game isn’t one at all. To stake a life on a game of dice, and to be gifted life back: *that* is surely novel. And what human endeavor isn’t always touched by fate? Alea and ilinx are our goals. If ilinx turns at the bottom of it all, we’re brought down to the churning, or left above it, by chance bridges or their collapse abridgement.

I.III.III

The act of playing out always possesses the unknown for the viewer, so ilinx rises again: there is no divine coordinator: the lie of one is what keeps our game going; all this, must surely be, could never be other than, totally intentional. What oddness, what abuses, what tricks and turns and shocks, dips and dives, must be sheer unrelenting, facts of masks, personas, willfully

⁵³ Roger Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*, (Urbana, IL: U of Illinois, 2001), 17

donned. Another type brought forward. But this, more orderly type, is giving way to a system, not discreet quadrants, but a procession, to a point: Observe:

Mimicry. All play presupposes the temporary acceptance, if not of an illusion (indeed this last word means nothing less than beginning a game: *in-lusio*), then at least of a closed, conventional, and, in certain respects, imaginary universe. Play can consist not only of deploying actions or submitting to one's fate in an imaginary milieu, but of becoming an illusory character oneself, and of so behaving. One is thus confronted with a diverse series of manifestations, the common element of which is that the subject makes believe or makes others believe that he is someone other than himself. He forgets, disguises, or temporarily sheds his personality in order to feign another.⁵⁴

The mimicry in shedding self to "feign another" is inevitably grounds for the new. What's more, when known farces are undone, the trick disappears, and what was of worth, the novelty, with it. To reattain in the performance, one must either show latent talent at making appear "a diverse series of manifestations," or else must with great subtlety make powerful tricks. However, once one has reached this place, and revealed it, there is little reason to depend on it. Mimicry is inherently bound to produce *ilinx* in the young, they cannot see behind the mask. But when one does gain that critical faculty, the mimicry is no longer judged on the grounds of its inherently disorienting quality, it is placed in communication with all other mimicry, and the greatest proves himself disorienting by virtue of his talent, and not the act alone. Thus:

⁵⁴ Roger Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*, (Urbana, IL: U of Illinois, 2001), 19

I.III.IV

Agon. A whole group of games would seem to be competitive, that is to say, like a combat in which equality of chances is artificially created, in order that the adversaries should confront each other under ideal conditions, susceptible of giving precise and incontestable value to the winner's triumph. It is therefore always a question of a rivalry which hinges on a single quality (speed, endurance, strength, memory, skill, ingenuity, etc.), exercised, within defined limits and without outside assistance, in such a way that the winner appears to be better than the loser in a certain category of exploits.⁵⁵

All things, adhering to telos, build to a point. While the obvious disorienting novelty of mimicry disappears, it is rebuilt into competition, and the fact of there being an unknown winner or loser again calls to mind that it is novelty we seek, even in the most ordered things. From the whirlpool, we rise to the tower, agon ascendant, and back down again.

And a descent through this ordering, into the articulation that we build our games to gain novelty — that, in fact, we build things because the building bring us up to divinity, cacophony — will always yield what I had before said was the goal: what is novel to the seeker of knowledge is not simply new knowledge, for that exists most frequently on the same valence as any other fact. What is novel to the scholar is unknowing, and we build our towers of Babel because we delight in seeing them fall: it proves to us there is a higher power, and one which we ever fail to attain.

To the degree that such a claim (itself and its form) was a gambit, I've done at least what was technically ask: here fully filled are the sixty bigguns, in preparation for a jolly whitsuntide.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 14

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