

RENEE DESCARTES AFRAID OF DROWNING



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HE DREAMED OF LIFE WITHOUT VEHICLES

He exited the car in the rain with the sensation of extreme distance between his wrists and his hands, which appeared totally white, totally alien to him. Such that rain-water filtered through a tall bank of reeds and came to the road brackish and brown, such that his hose stained. Soaked, the end of his moustache tapered into his mouth, he sucked at it, he drank rain and hair beneath a large floppy hat. He had envisioned the car and horses beneath a second flood, floating upwards or thrashing against a closed sun-roof. He'd seen his bones accredited, his flesh exchange one set of values for another, and little parasitic fish swim out from the submerged banks and taverns to fix themselves by the mouth to his body. He attributed his survival to the rock-block of ELO playing on the radio as he traveled underground. He thanked lucky ELO. He thought that Phaeton had borrowed his father's golden Sebring and foolishly gone off-roading. He recalled the Sebring eliding the expected splash and simply passing into the ocean as if moving into shadow. And then the Sebring salvaged the next day, filled with seaweed but the body of Phaeton was never recovered. He couldn't remember at which point in the story the earth was set on fire but he was fairly sure that it was. He never wore a seat-belt because he sensed contingency in all things.

HE LOCKED THE DOOR OF HIS VEHICLE AND RELOCKED IT TO MAKE SURE

He dreamt that an ugly mole on the side of his calf grew spontaneously into a long, fleshy tendril, resembling something like a rat's tail or a pale carrot. It disgusted him and he attempted to sever it first by squeezing it, like a pimple, then by attempting to pinch it between his finger-nails, although it was by that point far too thick and even wriggled in resistance. He began to saw at it with a comically over-sized brass key around his neck and even contorted his body in an attempt to gnaw through it with his teeth. At this point in the dream the mise en scene shifted and Descartes was crying on a sofa, bothering a molar with his tongue until it fell out into his palm, about the size of a strawberry and hollow, filled with mold or cobwebs. Sobbing and embarrassingly red-faced, he moved around the room showing his deformed tooth to everyone—he was too sad to speak, but kept up an inarticulate stream of wet babbling. Drool stained his white collar in the shape of his home-town. *There is a better world than this wretched situation*, he thought, imagining the humiliation of life without teeth, the huge gap between lips he already considered grotesquely wormy and purple, *that I can, by renouncing the state I find myself in, I can wake into*. And concentrating, he did so, tossing and turning in uncomfortable lucidity in his pajamas in a Swiss inn. Did he attempt to wake further, passing upwards and upwards into infinitely preferable lives? Did he make things with his hands? He stayed in bed all morning, thinking back on miracles he had heard of and encountered in his life. He remembered the story of a man who had cured his crippled legs by contemplating a photograph of Beyonce three hours a day for four years, offering her devotional candles, praise, black hard candy peeled carefully from white paper.

AS HE LOOKED FROM HIS WINDOW

the well in the water and
with glass tubes he studied
the progress of blood
through the bodies of animals
he steeped his tea too long
he threw out a brown clay cup
with a crack along the face

AND DRAWING THE SASH

much rain in the road and
outside someone howling
in a local language he
drew his wet curtains he
modeled *dryness*,
heat as vocal tics passing
from one vessel to another,
influencing very little

AND ATTEMPTING TO FOCUS ELSEWHERE

the howling was a love song and
people threw coins into a brown
clay cup although the language
was opaque and even less visible
through rain which touched the knees
of aldermen and children stupid enough
to drink from the streets fell ill,
filled pewter jugs with thin vomit.
the chemistry of the phlogiston was
Cartesian chemistry. a rain was several
the rain split among towns was several.
it drew a variable line along
an ordered plane. and phenomena, altered

AND PASSING FROM THE TOWN

he asked Beyonce if it was disgusting
to rip so much meat from the bone
with his fingers and jam the fingers
into his mouth and if it was disgusting
to jab his tooth into the egg-shell and
put it to his mouth and suck. and falling backwards
into the lid of the well clutching his stomach
telling sentio ergo sum into the belly
full over with grease and each point a point
wet on his soft sweating body

AND HIS BODY

and his body apologizing
for the whole thing. mumbling.
and appreciating the quiet.
his whole weal backwards

AND HIS SLEEP

during prolonged rain
his dream was powerful sports cars
driving across the ocean

AND HIS SLEEP

his fingers held up to a lamp
were the fingers of a distinct material
approximating but not equivalent to
the flesh of his wrists and arms and chest—
less permeable, more rewritable.
was it the grease of animals, which,
smeared across his hands, made
them strange to him? he licked them
clean? and sleeping, dreamt
of inner circles opening to him,
to novel rooms in novel corridors?

AND IN HIS SLEEP I SAID TO HIM

Descartes, there's no escape from mediocrity.
I should know, because in the future all cars
are frail birds filled with water and the end
of all our inquiry is making ice-cubes out of
different shaped trays.

I googled “‘Dungeons & Dragons’ + ‘pdf’ + ‘free’” for you—
I heeded your dream about your metal daughter
kept safely in boxes before hurled overboard
by every port official who went to sleep
without warm milk in a stained jug.
I read you ‘The Poem of Force’ before
you started snoring in my lap. Descartes,
who choked to death on novelty dice.

AND IN HIS SLEEP HE REPLIED

let's become so incredibly narcissistic
such that overstuffed with duck fat,
wine, warm milk also consuming
the strange fingers attached to our hands—

I mean, let's become odd spirits
encountered in Jay-Z's travels and adopted
as something like companion spirits,
or familiars to the man,
pressed to the swell of his glove compartment,
re-organizing his CD-Rs.

he said he had gone wild from tasting
rare oils pressed from rain water
in an alembic. his moustache flew
into lightning bolt shapes.
in the kitchen, he mistook your
mortal and pestle for a primitive bong.

dreaming, Descartes mispronounces Beyonce,
he roams from one end of his chart to another,
spilling water. he is obsessed with the integrity
of his lungs and their necessary fluids. his paper eye-lids.
I'm disappointed. he has hydro-planed for four hundred years
across our speech's vast Borders parking lot

SIX DESCARTES RIDDLES ON SEVEN POPSICLE STICKS

- Q: So what was Descartes? A: Six brain in eight jars.
- Q: And what was his story? A: A cautionary allegory.
- Q: But what did it mean? A: His night-gown was clean.
- Q: What did he fear? A: Out of fashion bog-wear.
- Q: And how did it end? A: Drowning on milk in bed.
- Q: Did the linens get wet? A: You bet.

I AM SEDUCED BY DESCARTES AT REEVES PARK IN PHOENIXVILLE, PA

Descartes felt like being profound, so
he said things like:

*God is not the cause of errors— and
The principle cause of error results from the prejudices of childhood.*

In my first sext to Descartes I falsely claimed
I was as handsome and smart as the guy
in Matthias Stomer's *A Young Man Reading By Candlelight*.

I read Descartes in a gazebo in a thunder-storm
when I had locked myself out of my apartment.
Later, Descartes let me climb through his bathroom window.
He allowed me to change into his stiff black suit.
He buckled the buckles on his borrowed black shoes.
On Descartes' futon, he pressed his thumb
against my temple until it passed through the skin
and he rubbed counter-clockwise against a particular
part of my brain regulating credulity, magical thinking,
predilections towards faith in UFOs, precognition,
chem-trails, black helicopters. He kissed
the soft cartilage of every living being in the city. He said

*Necessary existence is not contained in the same way in the ideas of other things,
but merely contingent existence.*

HOW LONG HE COULD HOLD HIS BREATH

looking sharp in his brown vest, his tweed jacket,
bow-tie and waders thigh-deep in bog-water,
with a broken bucket.

volumize the fluffy black hair of Descartes,
pull his moustache into a system of dirty strands
cohering through action into cleanness.

compress his chest, compress his chest,
put your mouth to his mouth until
bog-water passes from one to another

then spit out the bog-water

in the gallery of smartly dressed men standing
in bogs, who has suggested that we may become
the bog?

who has yet sucked bodies into their some 24,000
fluid liters of opaque enmity, thought
because they flowed, slowly,
or grew tepid and saturated with the bodies of crickets?

In his sleep, Descartes kicks his little legs,
croaks and crinkles up like an insect.
In his sleep it is curtains—his eyes roll up.
Who can claim the death of Descartes
in a fantasy of flooded interiors,
catastrophic water damage soaking up the archives?
and mildew on his icons of the so-called rap Illuminati,
and a wet towel bunched up in the back of his Bugatti? I mean,
his rust-colored Celica.

like many other character actors, he has never been naked—
workers in wet suits thumb through his body,
the mass-market database of his heavy cottons, his silk,

as though everything he conceived of as the case
was ruined by rising tides,

as though the levee in his pocket was sufficient.
if the body is a bog

don't drink it

NOTES

p. 1) Descartes' accounts of several dreams are in *Discourse on Method*.

p. 2) the idea that "Phlogistic chemistry is Cartesian chemistry" is taken by "On the Theory of Phlogiston," written by a Mr. Rodwell and published in the January, 1868 issue of *Philosophical Magazine*.

p. 4) material about Descartes' apocryphal automaton daughter can be found in Gaby Wood's *Edison's Eve*, which also draws a tenuous but possibly helpful line from Descartes to Benjamin's Mechanical Turk.

p.6) –becoming a bog suggested by A. Degan

-the Illuminati/ Bugatti rhyme is first suggested, to my knowledge, in Rick Ross' "Holy Ghost"