

Theologically Unsound

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When Fortuna spins you downward, go out to a movie and get more out of life. Ignatius was about to say this to himself; then he remembered that he went to the movies almost every night, no matter which way Fortuna was spinning.

—John Kennedy Toole, *A Confederacy of Dunces*

The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit walk into a bar built of clouds and joy.

“My Son,” the Father bellows over His own gilded pitcher, “what did you enjoy most about life on Earth?”

Jesus ponders for a second, lightly stroking his goatee. He answers, confidently, “Being famous.”

The Holy Spirit quips back, “Fat lot of good that did you.”

I.

God is dead, and I don't need Him. That we live today without Our Father (who art in Heaven) is a fact we acknowledge with a smug smile and a satisfied nod. We are serfs, the lot of us, finally liberated from the most oppressive indentured servitude. We revel in the independence, in the meritocracy of the void, free to pursue our own interests in what seems to be the power vacuum to end all power vacuums. In the wake of His dismissal, we've made some interesting trades: piety for decadence, Communion wine for an ice-cold Frappuccino, Church for the Internet—The Body of Christ for the Body of Me. There's been a transition, a regime-change, and I think it's only right to wonder what we've gained and what we've lost. “*Meet the new boss, same as the old boss*”—that sort of thing, though I have a feeling the new boss is quite different.

I speak on behalf of modern man, resident of the 21st Century, sequestered in the metropolis—who, in his usual capitalistic manner, is busy bartering for a better life. And I'm informed by the story of Patrick Bateman, protagonist of Bret Easton Ellis's beloved *American Psycho*, who seems—despite being as rich as he is godless—tortured by the inadequacy of his stupendously superficial existence. We feel for Bateman, even though he could very easily be labeled the foulest human being on the planet. Our empathy for him is, actually, impressively bountiful—beyond the level of compassion, beyond the level of charity. It's a family thing, I think—it has to do with why I seriously doubt that Abel, looking back from some somber cloud, could ever *really* condemn Cain so long as he remembered that they had both suckled at the same teat. *American Psycho* leads us to a public stoning, as it should and as it will so long as murder is repulsive. And yet, however firmly we grasp the heavy rocks of justice, ready to let loose with the orgasmic release of the vindictive, of the vindicated, we will always be tempted to place Bateman squarely in the jaws of a time and place. It's the unspoken familiarity that drives us to an *atmospheric* understanding of the events that play out. Bateman rots *with* us, we feel, and because of that he need not be punished anymore.

It's true that, if Ellis accomplishes anything, it's making late-Eighties Manhattan into a tub of acid whose corrosiveness can be measured by a head-count of the living (define "living," please) and the dead. Evelyn asks Bateman, against the glow of the Home Shopping Club and underneath sheets of icy, undisturbed placidness, if his hairline is receding: "It's not, I find myself saying. It's hard to tell. My hair is very thick and I can't tell if I'm losing it. I really doubt it" (24). Of course, he can't tell because each hair is battered by "D-panthenol, a vitamin-B-complex factor," "polysorbate 80," "Aramis Nutriplexx" and "scalp-programming lotion" (27); just as he can't tell if his pores exude their natural oils because they are pumped with "spearmint face scrub," "exfoliating gel," "emollient lotion," "Gel Appaisant," "clarifying lotion," and "anti-aging cream" (28). Bateman is never uncertain except in determining what is organic or artificial, dead or alive, real or fake. His is the cyborg's dilemma.

And so we forgive him his homicidal tendencies because we, too, are cyborgs, subject to the oppressive social gravity of images, images, images. The only way to survive in such a climate is if you're half-machine, given the vulturous scrutiny of so many different eyes ready to pick you apart unless you're somehow reinforced. When Bateman appears to be thinking bodily—unlike his inconceivably robust morning routine, unlike his insufferable itemization, and unlike his disdainful apathy towards AIDS, minorities, and the

homeless, whom he instructs to “get a *real* job, you dumb fucking nigger”—we congratulate him for being human, because it makes us feel *that much better* as we rock back and forth feeling nauseous and afraid in the closets of our McMansions, which are too big and too cold for the blood (212). *American Psycho* is comfort food of a sort. You could call it *Chicken Soup for the Self-Consciously Materialist Soul*.

But Bateman never really loses his expensive anti-perspirant cool. He just thinks he does. He is, in fact, terrifyingly stable, even through the juiciest moments of murder and perversion and chainsaws and nailed vaginas and cannibalism. He goes for whores, appraising them with the eye of the experienced shopper: “her hair is *brownish* blond, not *real* blond, and though this infuriates me I don’t say anything because she’s also very pretty; not as young as Christie but not too used up either. In short, she looks like she’ll be worth whatever it is I’m paying her by the hour” (171). As he switches from sex to the prospect of death, he never ceases to take inventory in the same familiar drone: “a half hour later I’m hard again. I stand up and walk over to the armoire, where, next to the nail gun, rests a sharpened coat hanger, a rusty butter knife, matches from the Gotham Bar and Grill and a half-smoked cigar” (176). Even in the midst of his favorite things in the world—or so he tells us—he retains his fashion obsession and monotone nonchalance: “I place a camel-hair coat from Ralph Lauren over her head, which drowns out the screams, sort of. I keep shooting nails into her hands until they’re both covered—nails bunched together, twisted over each other in places, making it impossible for her to try and sit up” (245). Neither Eros nor Thanatos nor some disgustingly explicit combination of the two will suffice to awaken Bateman from his taxonomic stupor.

And oh, how he wants to, how he wishes desperately to shave against the grain, to transcend an engorged culture of meaningless over-drugged, over-sexed, and overspent pleasures, complacent though he may appear in its orgiastic undulation. How he wishes for the bodies of “two mutilated prostitutes” to be more important than “the shocking amount of laxative and speed that the cocaine in Manhattan is now being cut with” and “the virtual impossibility of landing an eight o’clock reservation at PR, the new Tony McManus restaurant on Liberty Island” (367). A citizen of the empire populated by incorrigible emperors—Caligulas, the lot of them, demanding piece of entertainment after piece after piece—he yearns to be more than a dilettante, to stop sampling and experience something *whole*. He wants to be an artist. He wants infamy, which is better than fame. He wants to be above the Eighties,

no longer caught up in the tide of atmosphere and circumstance, no longer a footsoldier in the army of Wall Street clones. He wants to be *immortal*.

Immortality, we remember, is *not* the domain of humans, who are by nature shackled to death and decay. But it is their solemn and perpetually nagging want—and I suspect that even the most grimly nihilistic hermits yearn to breach the limits of life and limb. Bateman lives, curiously enough, in a society of few limitations—he can do whatever he wants, it seems, without the threat of death or even arrest. But physical immortality is, in the manner of Bateman’s entire life, just something creepy and thoroughly unsatisfying. What he’s looking for is immortality of *image*, which can only be created through the participation of the community: news headlines, word-of-mouth, *America’s Most Wanted*. And thus the entire tragedy is that his is an unheard of and unremarked-upon existence that no one seems to know about, care about, or, most important, *talk about*. “So what I’m assuming is that, essentially, like, no bodies have been found,” he tells us, lamenting the drowned-out meaningfulness, the final silence, of his life’s work (367). Even his memoirs are recorded for naught, since they will be bought by the same apathetic populace, the same group of deaf-mutes; “this confession has meant *nothing*,” he darkly and angrily intones (377). *American Psycho* is a message in a bottle unceremoniously stuffed into a vending machine. The murders may not have been real, and he has no way of knowing because he’s not getting any feedback. He probably never will.

It’s fitting that *American Psycho* is a book of exaggerated brutality and exaggerated banality, because exaggeration is what Bateman *really* pines for. He not only wants there to *be* a memory of him—he wants to be remembered as something *greater* than what he is. He wants his image, passed on from generation to generation, to be infused with the fantastic, the extraordinary, the profound. He wants there to exist a Patrick Bateman *legend*, orated with glorious candor over the fire in Hrothgar’s mead-hall—*boomed*, so that the world and all its children can hear it and know the sordid adventures of Bateman the Magnificent.

Ellis’s cynicism seems dastardly sometimes, the way he paints Bateman’s space as such an inescapable bear trap and the way he smites the man’s ambitions. The truth is, Bateman wants what we want, which is nothing less than a kind of godhood—and Ellis snatches it away. Immortality and cultural immunity are left unbearably impossible in the wake of Bateman’s somber words; his unfulfilling pursuits, itemized as always, are left as a receipt detailing the precise worthlessness of his ambition for modern transcendence.

I suppose it makes sense, given the time and place. Bateman wants to experience something sacramental where there are no more sacraments, to practice sins of the flesh where there are no sins, nor even any flesh unaltered by silicone and chemicals, to be an angel of death in a world without angels. How can he become a legend in a place where everyone is so inconceivably self-absorbed? There is no human interaction in *American Psycho*—only stilted, canned phrases, mistaken identities, and meaningless debates—“what are the rules for a sweater vest?’ Van Patten asks the table” (153). There is no *you*, *us*, or *them*—only *me*. Bateman and his ilk are more obsessed with their images than the inhabitants of any other epoch past, Louis XIV included, and they are left paradoxically impotent at self-preservation. In the face of so much crippling, paralyzing banality, legendry—the practice of creating and upholding and exaggerating human magnificence—blossoms into a very Darwinian necessity: it’s more than masturbatory, it seems, and it just might be something crucial to our survival.

But I’m left puzzled, staring quizzically at the edifice of the god-factory, because Bateman—damn it all!—still ends up immortal. Oh, sure, Ellis yanks him on the leash, keeping him from escaping empty Eighties excess, but Bateman still leaves his imprint like a force, a power, an element purer than the muddled porridge of ordinary humanity. He is still more idea than man, despite also being heavily mechanized and utterly, utterly petty. If his goal were simply to be the most quintessential, archetypal, poster-boy-perfect yuppie to ever walk the Earth—Yuppie with a capital Y, perhaps—then he might not feel so despondent.

It seems that he can achieve godhood, if we allow him to, by embracing the collective—by exuding “belonging” from every pore like his ten different varieties of facial cream, by wearing that facial cream as tribal war paint, by parading as witchdoctor of the white and wealthy. Ascendancy through rigorous adherence to the law of the land; ascendancy through perfect enslavement; ascendancy through advertisement. Implicit in the melancholy human monotone of Ellis’s prose is the idea of a power-balance between Man and Culture, each vying for a place of prominence in memory, history, posterity—the notion that you can be remembered either for *who you were* or for *what you were part of*. Culture seems to be winning, and there even seems to be a new mythic vocabulary—a new set of criteria—that characterizes Man’s glorious submission. Is this, then, the New Legendry? *Is this it?*

II.

Today we will be sorcerers. I move from the dark streets and the bleak, half-empty penthouses of Ellis's Eighties to the idealistically green grass of Didion's Sixties, and I feel like the same apocalyptic tourist—camera in hand, shuffled from place to place, ready to take pictures of seared nothingness. In the pages of *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*, I seem to find a spindly little web of dreams suspended over a bottomless hell-chasm, and Joan Didion seems to be there with me, as my guide, pointing at the antics of an oblivious group of spiders. In some ways it feels like Bateman's origin story, because hippies and California dreamers were the first ambitious souls confronted by a regime of nauseating soullessness. The tragedy of the "Golden Land" is that it turns out to be barren.

In the California Didion observes, glazed-over nonchalance meets sunshine halfway, bathing the land—the "Golden Land"—in the milk and honey that seep into a single mantra, a single historical identity: "we were just crazy kids" (4). "The future always looks good in the golden land because no one remembers the past," (4) she tells us, before diving into stories that tell us that too: Joan Baez, the proprietor of the Institute for the Study of Nonviolence in Carmel Valley, distills the world into candy morsels for her students' consumption—"babies and flowers,' a pretty little girl breathes. 'But that's so beautiful, that's the whole point'" (50). Michael Laski, General Secretary of the Communist Party U.S.A. (Marxist-Leninist), yearns for Mao and says his "particular opiate is history" (63). There are, most famously, the hippies of San Francisco's Haight Street, "an army of children waiting to be given the words" (123). And the past is important—the world is important, reality is important, sociopolitical climate is important, *words* are important—so we're led to buy into a silent dread, as participants in the anthropology of the doomed, the damned, the diseased. The dread is of worthlessness, of meaninglessness, of pointlessness, of futilely erecting monuments of idealism—of *practicing* idealism—in a black hole. Didion makes us feel it. But from where, exactly—from what part of our collective *gut*—does it come? *Slouching Towards Bethlehem* is a painful book to read, and I want desperately to appraise its weapon.

Christopher Nolan's *The Prestige* once spoke to me—rather pejoratively, I might add—as a member of audiences large and small. The film told me that I secretly hated magic, that, onstage, if something were suspended between normalcy and a heightened state—disappearance, for instance—without resolution, I'd be liable to hiss and boo and probably withhold my applause. I'm

still not sure if those accusations were correct. On some level, Didion seems to milk the tragedy of the real-world wizard—that the “Golden Dream” isn’t real, that “finding love on acid” and then losing it when the acid wears off isn’t finding love at all (97), that “mundane ecstasy” is really only something painfully mundane (120), that, in general, all of these people try to exercise powers that neither the universe nor the audience will tolerate for long. But these Californians seem to be more than just aspiring magicians—tricksters trying to prestidigitate their way out of boredom, oppression, physics, law. It’s haunting, the way their ambition extends so far beyond the transient abilities—and even the promises—of their hallucinogenic bag of tricks.

Didion describes her beloved hippies most often as “children,” and it is through that image—of the small, stifled, prevented by some God or curfew or overbearing parents from becoming large, from occupying space—that I really begin to feel the anguish of their existence. It is Bateman’s anguish, though in some ways it’s different, in some ways worse. The residents of Haight Street want to be *remembered*, known for something, and despite their ahistorical philosophy—indeed, perhaps *because of* it, because it renders them the only people of any importance in their own eyes—they want to have a historical identity. “At some point between 1945 and 1967 we had somehow neglected to tell these children the rules of the game we happened to be playing,” Didion informs us, implying that these would be the years *glossed over*—the mistake to be stricken from the record (123). Legendry requires acknowledgment of culture and history first, grandeur second. The hippies’ ignorance leads to their turmoil because they siphon from the memory of other, greater cultural units: they are “able only to feed back certain of [society’s] most publicized self-doubts, *Vietnam, Saran-Wrap, diet pills, the Bomb*” (123). Theirs is the tragedy of the parasite, unable to create or even live on its own. Theirs is the tragedy of image-makers—memory-makers—unable to produce the desired wattage, unable to be seen in a cacophonous orgy of things seen. Theirs is the tragedy we experience whenever we feel eternally bound—like Bateman, also—to that heaving, slouching beast: culture ascendant, society supreme, the collective speaking on our behalf, without our consent, at the bench of whatever court ends up appraising our memory. And Didion throws around the word “children” as if she were part of a chorus of “adults”—the just, the conservative, those to be remembered for prudence while the hippies are remembered for disobedience. That’s a legend—that *we were right* and *they were wrong*—but it’s hardly an expression of any kind of sovereignty. The New Legendry, such that it exists, kindly reminds us that iconoclasts are still indebted to image, that rebels are what they rebel against.

We're trapped in a mosaic, resigned to the same particulate fate as the objects around us. The hippies are LSD—see: *Saran-Wrap, or the lack thereof*. Bateman is his double-embossed business card—compared, at snide and thorough length, to those of his peers over espresso and Armani ties. It's funny how materialism always ends up being the issue, because none of these items will suffice, and existence among them is a doomed existence. *American Psycho* is an endless list of objects with no inherent value: clothes, luxury accoutrements, and even people that simply bear descriptions. Bateman wants *things* to become *instruments of murder*; he wants them to assume power and meaning beyond what they simply *are*. His struggle with the world of objects mirrors his struggle with himself, as he flounders around trying to latch onto any fleeting idea of Patrick Bateman subjectivity, of Patrick Bateman as a sovereign entity rather than a yuppie on the assembly line. Legends, we are reminded, do not simply subsist on the glorification of the individual—they require mythic atmosphere, and they must contain mythic objects. In some ways, the hippies' fascination with drugs is a hidden plea for talismans, cauldrons, Eye of Newt, the Holy Grail—items whose significance begets quests, which in turn *unlock* human magnificence. Would Jason have been Jason without the Golden Fleece? The hippies' insatiable desire is to be residents of a "Golden Land" not referred to as such (the way Didion refers to it) with irony or a sigh—and filled, like myth, with Golden Stuff. We need, desperately, for objects to be more than objects—for *things* to be more than *things*. Our own transcendence will follow.

III.

Godhood. Only the stakes are different. Oscar Wao wants transcendence too, and I can't shake the suspicion, armed as I am with rancid evidence of a world gone sour, that it's a lost cause. He's not built for greatness, it seems. Aside from a brief stint as a "preschool loverboy," the rotund hero of *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* begins and ends his life a "parigüayo," or "party-watcher," with "none of the Higher Powers of your typical Dominican male" (Díaz 19). His is frequently a sad existence. But Junot Díaz gives us all the familiar elements of noble oral history—the rhythm, like an unstable heartbeat quickening and lapsing with the changing tide of exciting adventures; the earnest exaggeration, spreading bombast and gloss over every surface of the narrative; the cultural watermark embedded into every Spanglish phrase that gives off the scent of proud community ownership—and we expect the boy to be a legend. We expect it partly because Patrick Bateman, for all his

bloody attempts at sacramental majesty, has failed. And we expect it also because Oscar—the meek, the idealistic, the erudite, the unwanted—deserves more than anyone else to stand astride this scorched, God-forsaken Earth like Paul Bunyan.

The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao is burdened by that word “wondrous,” emblazoned across its cover like a Miss America sash. It seems to task itself, at the outset, with creating wonder for a public that has been divorced from wonder for years. We see this kind of effort in a film like *Mr. Magorium’s Wonder Emporium*, self-consciously engorged with candy-coated imagery that could induce diabetic shock. The corporate definition of “wonder”: a toy store mired in facsimiles of magic and whimsy—things whizzing around and looking shiny—that just makes us yearn all the more for the real thing. But Díaz does something curious, something extraordinary, something perhaps crucial: he immerses himself, his character, and his book in the stimuli of wonders past. He points, with a dexterous, energetic finger, at the mass-media that shape the intricate geography of Oscar’s dreams: *Lord of the Rings*, *Dungeons & Dragons*, *Planet of the Apes*, *Penthouse*. He uses those not-so-sacred texts and footnotes them like Talmudic scholarship. He makes his hero a nerd, a sponge, an encyclopedia—he feeds Oscar until he can be fed no more, until his girth and even his Afro are stuffed with stories. He makes sure that Oscar is unmistakably Dominican, because “every Dominican family has stories about crazy loves, about niggers who take love too far” (45). He makes Oscar into the very representation of cultural bloatedness—like Bateman, an elemental force, but this time Cacophony rather than Homogeneity—and takes the legend from there.

As a result, Oscar is filled to the very wide brim with a romanticism of impossible scope, Love itself becoming almost a secondary goal to *love on the battlefield*, that rare and particularly pungent variety that blooms amidst turmoil and strife; as he eyes Maritza, his first crush, he is “convinced that one day, when the nuclear bombs fell (or the plague broke out or the Tripods invaded) and civilization was wiped out he would end up saving her from a pack of irradiated ghouls” (27). And his career ambitions are no less bombastic, as he envisions—divines, really—a future spent *creating* the things that enchant him: space operas, fantasy epics, dungeon drama, apocalyptic romance. Never mind that his writing evokes Kilgore Trout rather than Tolkien; the point is that he considers himself the world’s next *god of other worlds*. In some respects Bateman and the hippies seem modest by comparison, enthralled merely in the pursuit of, in one Haight resident’s tormented words, “something. Anything” (Didion 98). But the desire is the same: escape,

autonomy, sovereignty, the ability to emit one's own gravitational field. Ellis and Didion both point to our monstrous modern self-consciousness, the way it wraps like an invisible boa around our heads. Díaz wraps Oscar in the blubber of ingested high fantasy—superheroes and sorcerers and alien seductresses—as well as a proud ethnicity. It's no surprise that the boy ends up yearning for mythic stature.

Is he a legend? Is he wondrous? It might help that he's Dominican. Oscar battles the elements: *fukú*, “the Curse and the Doom of the New World,” a metaphysical aberration that moves across sociopolitical barriers and seems to craft the history of his entire family—love, death, impossible tragedy and, occasionally, utter foolishness (1). *Fukú* killed Kennedy. *Fukú* drives Oscar's grandfather into the hellish prisons of the Dominican dictator, Trujillo, whom Díaz paints in exaggeratingly (though perhaps fittingly) soot-black Sauron-strokes. *Fukú* drives his mother, Belicia, into the arms of “The Gangster,” a sketch of sketchiness whose recurring anonymity makes him seem *more* notorious than Tony Montana. *Fukú* drives people around enough that free will seems to be in short supply; it reeks of storybook destiny just as much as its antithesis, *zafa*—the urgent incantation whispered *in the event of fukú*—reeks of magic. These words are runes; they are the linguistic manifestations of powers beyond language, of powers that simply *be*. Oscar does not necessarily conquer *fukú*—indeed, he ends up beaten and murdered in a cane-field, defeated in the pursuit of lunatic love—but he coexists with it, grapples with it, reckons with it. It's an extraordinary element in a universe molded from extraordinary elements—in a universe that seems custom-tailored for behavior on a mythic scale. Without *fukú*, there would be no Oscar legend.

For Bateman, whores are part of an endless series of meaningless MacGuffins with no dramatic weight—items *used* in the pursuit of his gory rituals. For Oscar, a prostitute—Ybón, the love of his life—becomes the Virgin Mary, the Holy Grail; she is an indelible image on the horizon that he pursues with fanatical, daring zeal. He is overcome by the glorious choreography of *quest*—pirouetting majestically toward an object in the sky, battling demons and Ringwraiths and vast, oppressive antagonistic forces. He lives in a universe that allows him to *give himself over* to a ridiculous journey, to shed the tyranny of self-image and paradoxically bolster the Memory of Oscar to heights unimaginable. And he has mystical help: the Mongoose, who appears to him in dreams as a golden, silky-furred sage (and here we finally have something *truly* Golden, something with a power worthy of its luster). “What will it be, muchacho?” it asks him after defeat. “More or less?” (301). The answer is always *more*. Oscar is no god or hero in physical build—like

most of us, he never will be—so Díaz asks us to pay attention to what external and internal elements combine alchemically to make him so fucking magnificent.

Legends, like gigantic, fantastic flowers, require care and circumstance to bloom. They need a certain rhythm and a certain climate. Díaz pours an awful amount of energy into the presentation and atmosphere of his saga for good reason, it seems; otherwise, it would not be conducive to wonder. It was Voltaire, of all people, who said that “if God did not exist, it would be necessary to invent him” (“Epistle”). We don’t need God so much as we need a world where divinity is possible, in the air and in ourselves—a world of sacraments, of magic objects, of intangible abstracts that seem to move through us and drive us to heightened states. And yet, lost in the pursuit of our own fucking magnificence we never seem to realize what the pursuit of fucking magnificence entails. We all want to be the Pharaoh, a demigod buried with his wives and his cats, without realizing that the Pharaoh had an entire world built around him and a disciplined deference to total mysticism—to the humility of spirituality, which Bateman and the rest of us sorely lack. Nowadays, Culture threatens to capsize our tiny boats because it’s the only thing left with any power to linger and simmer in memory; the only thing that still cannot be thoroughly and concisely explained.

It’s hard to believe, but I find myself agreeing wholeheartedly with Ignatius J. Reilly, the corpulent armchair philosopher of John Kennedy Toole’s *A Confederacy of Dunces*. From his dubious position of moral superiority, Ignatius preaches the need for “theology and geometry” in the sinful streets of his very own Sodom—New Orleans, the French Quarter, bathed in smells and sounds of decadence and excess (42). He’s a strange, anachronistic blowhard most of the time, but he may in fact be right. It seems that we *do* actually need a world of divinities and divine concepts—of ethereal, impossible ideals, of strange perfections that we strive earnestly to touch and embody. Poor Ignatius thinks he might be a legend, were his robust soul set free from an unfortunate body and the trappings of a society intent on putting him to work. In reality, his world, like ours, just needs a bit more spirit. The confederacy of dunces needs to transform into a confederacy of magical thinkers.

We need mystery injected into our affairs, until we can no longer describe with absolute certainty, like Bateman, the items that constitute our field of vision. Didion, in her usual journalistic manner, is always searching for lingering traces of the human extraordinary, and in a brief moment of pure, radiating joy, she stumbles upon Howard Hughes. “It is impossible to think of Howard Hughes,” she writes, “without seeing the apparently bot-

tomless gulf between what we say we want and what we do want . . . between, in the largest sense, the people we marry and the people we love” (72). No one wants his insecurity, but everyone *remembers* how he bought himself a new world: a vast paranoid enclave in which he could cloister himself like a hoarding dragon and buy a sandwich at any hour of the night, a world overflowing with the enchantment that makes bizarre behavior possible. He is, according to Didion, “the last private man, the dream we no longer admit” (72). He *remains* a potent presence—he remains—because we still can’t figure him out.

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