

The Earth Turns To Bring Us Closer

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Human Life! Who would live it? The ends obscured, the beginnings forgotten, the middles pecked by the pack – lives so short that they are over just as wisdom appears, but lived so quickly that the slow processes of evolution that would make sense of it all are invisible.

Who would live it? These people would. They are lovers, all of them. They come wrapped up in the sensual material they call their skins. Every twitch and follicle parades the event that engulfs them, which is the event of being alive. Their eyes strike first, alert, self-doubting, delicate, and beautiful in their apprehension, left eyes freighted with care, right eyes on guard. And then their heavy heads, held still against their pulses as though wings steadied in the wind. And finally their hearts come into view, slowly, like the curve of the earth gives up its horizon.

And round these heads, as far as their eyes can see, is the edge of the actual world. They live in their observations. They live in the bowls of themselves; whose rims are at the height of their eyes above the ground, and everything inside the bowl is them as much as it is the world.



You know this story. In the beginning, it goes, God made the world. He divided the earth from heaven, the land from the sea, the night from the day, fish from fowl and woman from man, and made paradise. A place of calm and peace, where everything lived together in perfect harmony. But the two humans who lived there were tempted to know the secrets that lay behind the scenery; for which sin they got themselves thrown out. You may not know that there is another version of the story, maintained by the Coptic Christians but banned as a heresy by the Catholic Church, that explains the same events more clearly. It was not god but the devil that made the world, they say. He wanted to trap the spirit of life by incarcerating it in material form. And it was god, not the devil, who sent the serpent to Eve, to warn her of the trouble they were in. The devil was so angered by this that he smashed up the paradise he had constructed in a rage of retaliation, and the descendents of Adam and Eve – look no further than yourself – have lived in the broken hostile wreck of planet Earth ever since. Surrounded by rocks and ice and violent storms, beset by the hungers and desires of our miserable bodies, all we can do is pray. Because it is only prayer that can return us to the spirit world.

The theory of evolution has driven a bulldozer through these ideas, but still they hang around. They are survivors. The green crusade still sells a version of lost harmony in which all things exist in a delicate balance. And still, in schools, evolution is taught as though it were a creation story. As though it were a description of the orderly origins of the current world.

“We need the past to know about our future,” the teachers say, but the children know, without putting it into words, that the past is all memory and the future all hope. The only thing you can reach out and touch is the present, which is not orderly at all. The present is explosive; maybe not even teachable. So there is another heresy: evolution is a burgeoning event. The growth, the accumulation, the cross infections, mass extinctions and run

away hybridisations, the invasion of everything by everything else that we call by the name of Emergence. The world is an emergency! Your diplomas that guarantee the future are worthless! What academy would risk teaching that?

In this heresy it is not the fittest that survive, but the survivors. They are with us now, those snails, those black cats, those other humans. Life does not maintain in a delicate balance, but in a furious tension that is always rupturing. And a species is defined not by its image, but by the qualities of the currently existing basket of its members, whether snails or humans. But now wait a minute; here's the strangest thing: one of those vital qualities is potential. Another is experience. And so the past and future are re-embedded in us.

The master of *The Unbearable Lightness Of Being* jokes about the sentimental saying that "children are the future." Sure, he says, in the future the state apparatus will be so comprehensive that everyone will behave like children, because they will not have to take responsibility for their own actions! What a picture! Because without an individual response, the humans will not sustain. By clubbing together, by binding each to each, they think they can take arms against the broken world. But their politics of community is a politics of value, not actuality. It seeks the truth because the consensus it demands cannot operate without it, and so constructs a house of mirrors, a house of values, that reflects its community's own desires right back at itself. This is what we call the real world. And that real world, of market prices and university degrees and police forces, is not the actual world, where dwelleth Adam and Eve. And yourself. The actual world is the wilderness. It is not broken. It reflects nothing. It absorbs.

"There is knowledge" says the master of *The Autobiography Of Alice B Toklas*, "and there is what you know." She was being modern: she means the problem of objective and subjective. Objective truth may not be possible but subjective truth is. With every turn of the Earth, with every morning, you wake up to it, whatever it is. You have established it by close observation of the world you are in. Which suggests that it is possible, even as a contemporary particle of the exploding present, to take responsibility for yourself. To be not separatist, but separate. Not modernist, but modern. And most of all, not humanist, but human.



How do particles react? No one knows, and no one can find out. The observer's presence changes the event observed. But it is exactly that presence that makes the truth a personal matter. Look at the gazing heads again, holding steady as they can in their questing temerity. Try it yourself. Hold still and observe. Make every swallow and every blink critical. The sounds you can hear all round you are the sounds of the world, the waves, the birdsong, the hum of the deep space radiation. And this bowl whose rim is the horizon is the wilderness you inhabit. It could be that you have fallen there, body heart and mind together; it could be that you have chosen to be there. Whichever way, it is your world. Your head and those others are linked not as a community, but as islands in an ocean of possibilities, each head a lighthouse beaming out the presence of the edge of a piece of land. Together, you are witnesses to the turning world.