Reaction-Formation

by C. P. Boyko

"*I* had a dream last night," said the doctor at last, then lapsed again into pointed silence.

Archie shifted uneasily on the couch. "Oh?"

"Yes. I dreamt that I had to go somewhere, somewhere far away from where I felt safe and comfortable and appreciated, and after a long and arduous journey I arrived at the designated place *only to discover* that the person I was supposed to be meeting . . . was there waiting for me. It was very gratifying, and I did not feel at all foolish or maltreated."

"I'm sorry I was late," said Archie for the second time.

"No," corrected Dr. Pringle. "You're not. If you were sorry to be late you would not *be* late."

"I guess that's true." He had hoped the session would not go this way. "I guess I must be resisting something?"

This mollified Pringle, to Archie's relief. His question could just as easily have prompted another of the doctor's transparent wish-fulfillment dreams: one in which, for example, he, the doctor, was skillfully digging a hole or erecting a wall or something *without* any clumsy oaf coming along to take the shovel or the trowel out of his hands.

"I don't have to tell you that you're only harming yourself," said Pringle. "You need all the time I can give you. You know that I see most of my patients *three* times a week. And they haven't half the complexes you have."

"What about the Gerbil Man?," Archie asked, using Dr. Pringle's code name for his prize patient—a fellow psychoanalyst who believed that invisible rodents were nibbling on him at the most inopportune times.

"As a matter of fact," said the doctor with strained modesty, "I've made rather something of a breakthrough with him."

Archie let the doctor talk; he had no choice. Most days he was quite content to have Pringle go on about his other patients: it took some of the heat of scrutiny off himself, and occasionally some of what the doctor said was actually interesting. Today, however, Archie felt strangely anxious to speak. He was, he realized, happy.

Archie extended his legs, careful not to appear restless. He was, for once, thankful for the more traditional arrangement of the furniture in this office, which Pringle borrowed from a local colleague for this one hour each week. In Pringle's own office upstate, the couch faced his desk and consequently one had to take care to look interested or attentive when he talked about his colleagues or his other patients. The doctor did not return this courtesy when Archie talked about his own life, preferring to stare out the window or make notes or mutter to himself. Once, waving Archie on, he had even taken a phone call. Apparently, Dr. Pringle did not think that it was important that he see his client, but that his client see him. "It aids the transference," he had once said. So, to compensate for the unfavorable position of his colleague's couch, instead of simply turning it around, Pringle brought with him a framed photograph of himself, which he hung on the wall opposite Archie at the start of every session and removed at the end. In the picture the doctor looked startled, as if the photographer had snapped it without first explaining to him what photography was.

"And this," Pringle was saying, "is exactly what one would expect to find in a subject with such a perfect manifestation of castration anxiety produced by an affection-withholding mother and an emotionally absent father."

As something seemed to be expected of him, Archie said, with as much thoughtfulness as he could cram into two syllables, "I . . . *see*."

"I fully expect to be able to write the case up now in another six months or so."

"That's . . . smashing."

"But enough about him," said Pringle with sudden violence. "Why are you resisting treatment?"

Archie supposed he did arrive late rather often. Most of the time this

was just good sense: the doctor himself was almost never punctual. But perhaps this was, after all, only an excuse. There always remained the remote possibility that, like today, the doctor would be on time; and if he, Archie, nevertheless insisted on coming late, thereby risking Pringle's bitter inquest into his deeper motives, he really must be resisting some facet of what Pringle called the treatment.

He said honestly, "I don't know."

Dr. Pringle barked with laughter. "Of course you don't. That's what I'm here for. Well," he sighed. "Tell me about your week." A glottal film of detachment entered the doctor's voice.

Archie took a quavering breath and said, "Well, you know, it's silly but I think I've finally . . ." Not wanting to say something as puerile as "made a friend," he finished: "finally met someone." But this, he realized with embarrassment, made it sound like he'd met a girl, a potential lover.

"Ah ah ah," said the doctor. "Dreams first."

Archie hated Parcliffe at first. Everything was different here.

At Templeton the boarders had outnumbered the day boys by three to one; here, because the nearby town was so much larger, the ratio was inverted, and consequently it was the boarders, not the day boys, who were the second-class citizens. At Templeton, poverty had been disgraceful; here at Parcliffe, for some reason, it was *chic*. Even the masters dressed shabbily and let their hair grow long, like refugees or filthy beatniks. Here at Parcliffe there were no tennis courts, no swimming pools, and no one played chess. At Parcliffe, instead of a semi-private room, tenth formers were stuck in dorms; so, instead of the one roommate that his age and status should have entitled him to, Archie had three. And all three were asinine simpletons.

In fact, as Archie told his mother on the phone one week, all the boys at Parcliffe were either stupid or stuck-up. He tried to say this in the same lightly bitchy tone that she and her friends used when complaining about their exes, their analysts, or the filthy beatniks that had moved in next door. But he must have done it wrong.

"Darling, is it really so horrible as all that? Have I done perfectly the wrong thing?"

This should have been his cue to say something stoical, but her sympathy unmanned him. He held his eyes open, so the tears would evaporate.

Parcliffe Academy had been modeled on the English public school, but without any slavish adherence to verisimilitude. Little was known about Henry Parcliff, its founder. There was the rumor that, prior to the more lucrative inception of academies, he had made his living dowsing for water, coal, and gold with a forked stick. Aside from this, one fact could be inferred about Parcliff: he had never been within miles of an English public school. The school that took his name had probably been fashioned from what he remembered of a few English memoirs or Bildungsromans read in his youth. His intent, no doubt, had been to suggest the chilly, aristocratic (and expensive) atmosphere of those schools, but with as few strokes (and at as little cost) as possible. He must have found that the easiest way to do this was to give things impressively English-sounding names. Thus, Parcliff's school was christened Parcliffe Academy; its teachers were called Masters; its dormitory residences were called Houses; teacher's pets were called Prefects; grades were called forms; final exams were called A-levels; French was called Latin; and baseball was called cricket.

This scheme allowed the boys' parents to say to their friends things like, "My Arthur has just scored a beta-alpha on his Tenth Form A-levels," which sounded more lovely to their ears than its American translation ("My boy just passed grade ten with a B average"). They could also say that their boys "up at" Parcliffe were on the rowing team and in the First Eleven at cricket. This, indeed, was a privilege bestowed upon every parent—included, as it were, in the price of tuition—because participation in both these impressively English-sounding sports was mandatory; and, by the same sort of linguistic legerdemain that made every hall monitor a house prefect, every cricket team was called a First Eleven.

Cricket, indeed, was a perfect example on a small scale of the school's philosophy of style over substance, or nomenclature over reality. The cricket played at Parcliffe (unbeknownst to any of the boys who played it there) bore only the most superficial resemblance to the bona fide article. It was nearer to baseball than perhaps any other sport, but it was not very much like baseball. The returning boys knew the rules, or claimed to (though it soon became clear that there was as much scope here for interpretation as in biblical exegesis); the new boys were put in the harmless outfield positions and assured that they would "pick it up."

Archie, who at Templeton had been excused from all team sports as a conscientious objector to their symbolic bellicosity, watched the game closely at first—demonstrating his active interest in the proceedings by hunkering down into a limber half-crouch; occasionally slapping his hands together with rugged alacrity, like a lumberjack preparing to climb a tree; calling out scrupulously generic encouragement to his teammates; and expressing his chagrin, when the opposing First Eleven stole a wicket or scored a base, in the catchphrase then popular at Parcliffe: "Suck my *cock*," or simply, "*My cock*." Like a scientist working in the best Baconian tradition, he began by merely collecting data, without presumption; but soon this approach yielded, under a prolonged barrage of bewilderment, to wild conjecture. Desperately he tried to impose upon the scene of intermittent bedlam before him some underlying logic or rationale, some hypothesis that could guide his behavior or at least streamline his options should the ball come near enough to him and to no other player that he was forced to interact with it. But when this did not happen and continued to not happen, he found himself unequal to the effort of sustained attention. His mind began to wander.

Freykynd the Elvin Warrior, who wielded his dagger like a sword, observed from a safe remove the goblins performing their strange and barbarous rituals . . .

At Templeton in the dorm they had played a sort of game after lights out. Perhaps, he thought, it originated in a reflexive flouting of authority: to go to

sleep when they were *told to* would be to surrender a portion of their priceless autonomy. So, instead of sleeping, they talked. It didn't matter what one said, as long as one made one's voice, the voice of revolt, heard. (On second thought, perhaps the game had even deeper roots in a simple fear of the dark?)

As the game and the night progressed, the boys' eloquence waned, and words deteriorated into mere noise—grunts, animal calls, belches. The goal, at least as Archie saw it, was to be one of the last to make a sound—but not *the* last, because if no one replied you never knew whether your witticism (or sound effect) had been deemed unworthy of reply or whether you were the only one still awake. The best outcome, the clearest victory, was to say something, ideally after several minutes of silence, and be greeted with a chorus of groans, laughs, or weary and defeated *shut UP already*s. Then at last you could sleep, secure in the salience of your individuality.

They did not know this game at Parcliffe. One night, five minutes after lights out, Archie moistened his lips, raised his hands to his face, and blew a great sloppy mouth-fart into his palms. He held his breath, trembling with mirth, in the absolute silence that followed. When the silence continued, the twitching worm of suppressed hilarity in his guts became a twitching worm of apprehension. Why was no one saying anything? They couldn't be asleep, surely, not all of them, not already! The only explanation was that they did not think it was funny. Well, it wasn't meant to be brilliant—only an opening move, something to get the game started, like pawn to king four.

He pretended to be asleep, praying that no one had traced the sound to its origin. He lay there on his bunk, stiff with shame and loathing, for an hour before the dense, rotating knot of his thoughts finally began to break up and fly apart. He was given a moment's respite in which he was almost no one and nowhere; then his eyelids became transparent and the nightmares began.

He sat in the crowded dining hall, eyes on his book, and listened disdainfully, despite himself, to the stupid boys around him telling jokes.

"What's the difference between Master Perkins and a rock?"

"I'll buy."

"Perkins smells like shit."

"How can you tell Fatty Roberts from a bouquet of roses?"

"How."

"Fatty Roberts sucks your cock."

"Oh, hey, um, hello?"

Archie looked up. He recognized the boys who stood over him as Ambrose Tench and somebody Greaves from the Ninth Form—a year below him. (Tench, with his slouching posture and close-set eyes, Archie had already transported into the Kingdom of Yllisee as a minor character, Harpnox the Man-Bear, a dim-witted shopkeeper whose every line of dialogue was "snuffled.") Like everyone else at Pervcliffe, these two did not, apparently, know his name. He felt a pang of refreshingly pure hatred.

"Yes?"

"You *are* a catamite, aren't you?"

Though he did not recognize the word—that was the point—he did recognize the game. He and Lyle had played it at Templeton. The idea was to find some scurrilous word in the dictionary, then try to get other boys to admit that they were, for instance, steatopygous coprophiliacs or anencephalic monorchids or whatever it might be. The trick was to pose the question casually, as if only seeking confirmation of some humdrum, well-known fact.

"Oh, you know, I *used* to be," he said, "but then your bloody union fees just got out of hand."

The boys stared at him, faces slack as masks. "Yes, well, uh, all right . . ." They giggled uncertainly and moved off in search of their next victim.

"Clever clever," said a voice Archie recognized.

He was brought out of his reverie by some commotion. Instantly he was overwhelmed by the dread, so familiar to him from his nightmares, that

some specific but mysterious action was required of him, and that if he flubbed it he would be exposed before everyone as the fraudulent and altogether inadequate specimen that he was.

He looked up; there was the ball; he ran to meet it.

It seemed he would never reach it. His legs were heavy and uncooperative, as if he were running through some invisible fluid—

As he climbed to his feet, dazed and ashamed, the ball landed, with a prim *pat-pat*, on the turf a few feet away. It had not, after all, been his moment. He had run clear across the field and collided with Mawthorn who, with his eyes on the ball that was rightfully his, had not seen Archie coming.

He began to help the other boy up, but dropped him like a leper when his teammates' screams revealed to him that the ball was still in play! He lunged at it with simian abandon, snatched it up with both hands, drew back his arm and . . . Where? Where to throw it? The boys were all shouting at him but he was far beyond the reach of human language.

He hesitated for only a moment. His arm knew what to do, if he did not. He fired the ball, as hard as he could, at the bobbing, unhelmeted head of the running batsman.

He had time to admire his throw—its speed, its precision, the geometrical perfection of its arc, like the illustration in a physics textbook—before a twinge of disquiet tugged at his guts.

Luckily, his arm had not taken into account the fact that its target was moving. The ball missed the oblivious batsman's head by several inches, but came close enough that the infielder who had been running to catch it felt obliged to shout at the batsman to duck. The ball swooped to earth and rolled gracefully out of bounds. The opposing First Eleven had time to capture four more bases and break seven more wickets before it was retrieved.

Archie trudged back to his corner of the field, muttering and kicking at the turf as he went. This display of remorse did not express his disappointment, but concealed it: he was playing the part of the passionately engaged and ordinarily competent athlete cursing himself, unfairly, for the

sort of mistake that anyone might make. But this pantomime could no more evoke the true depth and complexity of his anguish than a tin whistle could perform a symphony of Rubbra's. To truly give vent to his feelings, he would have had, at the very least, to die.

No one chided him; no one even tried to cheer him. It was as if he did not exist.

He hated Parcliffe at first. Then he met Clayton Fishpool.

Fishpool was, in Archie's scheme of classification, perhaps the most stuck-up boy at the school. He wore an ascot and socks with sandals—either of which in isolation would have qualified him as the most eccentric character Archie had ever laid eyes on. He was idiotically handsome, with just the kind of soft lank hair that Archie believed, on his own head, would have made him look rakish, carefree, and sensitive, yet with a capacity for beautiful cruelty—but which, on Clayton Fishpool, only looked foppish. Aside from his physical appearance, Fishpool had about him an aura of self-sufficiency and complacent grandeur. He was sixteen, and he carried himself as though he had arrived at this sublimely remote age through his own foresight and diligence. For *The Lyre*, the school's snobbish literary newspaper, he wrote poems and editorials which he signed "C. S. Fishpool."

(He was known, in the gold and green groves of Yllisee, as Dartagnan the Disreputable, Dartagnan the Demi-Mage.)

"What's that you're reading?"

Archie held the book at arm's length and eyed it indifferently.

Fishpool emitted a high-pitched squeak. "Oh, *Strachey's* all right, but if you go in for that whole Bloomsbury thing you should really read Firbank."

Archie told his face to take on the expression of a man who had long ago resolved to look into Firbank and was now grateful for this reminder. In fact, he was appalled: He had chosen this book, as he chose all his books for public consumption, for its obscurity. He would not read "classics": to do so was, first, to admit unfamiliarity with them, and, second, to reveal a prosaic

and unoriginal soul. In the dining hall he therefore read *Two Noble Kinsmen* instead of *Hamlet*, *The Holy Sinner* instead of *The Magic Mountain*, *The Eternal Moment* instead of *Howards End*, George Meredith instead of George Eliot, Edward FitzGerald instead of F. Scott Fitzgerald, William James instead of Henry James, and someone like Lytton Strachey instead of someone whose work he actually enjoyed, like John Buchan or Aldous Huxley. He believed, or anyway sometimes imagined himself saying he believed, that the duty of the serious student of literature was not to tread the same old well-worn paths, but to blaze new trails, to seek out the unknown and unsung masterpieces. (Or was he simply afraid to read any book that someone might know better than he did?) He had thought Strachey safe; but now here was C.S. Fishpool, not only wearily familiar with Strachey, but able to name an even more obscure author whom Archie should have been reading instead.

"Well yes, Strachey's *all right* all right," Archie began his prepared statement with heavy if undirected irony, "though I do find at times that his prose can be a bit what you might call flowery in spots." (Twelve hours later, lying in bed and replaying this conversation in his head, he was wracked by remorse that he had not said "florid.")

Clayton Fishpool pushed his chair back and narrowed his eyes at Archie. "You say that like it's a bad thing, Archer old cock."

"Well, I suppose," Archie drawled, becoming defensively more languorous the more fretful he felt, "it's just that I feel sometimes that he's a bit, well, pleonastic." He fairly vibrated with tension as he waited for this bomb to drop; he had never said or heard the word spoken aloud and had no idea if he was pronouncing it correctly.

Fishpool threw back his shoulders. Archie would soon come to recognize this gesture as characteristic: it always preceded a diatribe. As Fishpool spoke, his shoulders would slowly roll forward again; periodically he would throw them back again, as if winding a clock.

Archie listened to him talk, his attention cutting in and out at random, as if by some mysterious physiological process. On a conscious level, he found Fishpool's apparently impromptu speech on the role of language in

literature clever and thought-provoking. But on an unconscious level? Perhaps he was only flattered to have someone talking to him at all—and someone who knew his name, no less.

A week later, Fishpool found Archie in the dining hall dutifully reading *Valmouth* (and holding it up rather conspicuously, for by this time he had also read, but without being discovered doing so, two other Firbanks—working his way chronologically backwards on the assumption that, like wine, writers improved with age).

"Tell me what you think," said Fishpool expansively, as if Archie's opinion of the book were only one of many things he wished to know.

"I find it to be," he said, taking care to make this sound not like a criticism but a dispassionate appraisal, "a bit, shall we say, thin on the ground insofar as plot is concerned."

"That is of course the *point*, cock. What makes Firbank so brilliant is that he has tossed out plot, story, action, chronological progression—all that dreadful muck. Plot is dead—and Firbank, before even the Moderns, helped kill it." Fishpool threw back his shoulders. "Literature," he said, "is not about *story* but about character—and by character one means the intricate machinations of the individual psychology. Say what you will about the sins and excesses of Joyce"—and here he paused gallantly, as if to allow Archie to say what he would about the sins and excesses of Joyce—"he did at least do one important thing for literature: he moved the stage into the mind where it belongs; he brought *thought* into his characters' heads . . ."

Several minutes later, Archie's face felt like it had cramped permanently into an expression of engaged receptivity, like that of a wise judge listening with a painstaking suppression of bias to a sympathetic witness.

Fishpool was saying, "Firbank of course works the same ground but from the opposite direction. His characters, or quote characters unquote, are all surface, all gorgeous glittering sound and light—'The play of shine and shade on the trees as the supple boughs wag.' We enter not at all into their thoughts. That is the clue, of course, the key: they are but the

thoughts, the psyche incarnate, of Firbank himself. You see, Archer, you have to read Firbank's *characters* as an expression of *Firbank's* character. And that is just what literature must aim to be, if it is to be literature at all: an expression of, a monument to, its creator's individuality. Or don't you agree?"

Archie, furrowing his brow and jutting out his jaw, said: "Well, *yes*, but . . ."

A black panic seized him by the throat. He had no idea what he was going to say next.

That evening, Archie had the room to himself; Rodney, Hollingsward, and Caulkins were out on some mission to waylay a group of Downsfield girls who were rumored to be making a foray into town. Archie went to his bedside locker and removed the latest five or six hundred pages of the manuscript of *The Adventures of Freykynd The Elvin Warrior* from its hiding place beneath his retired tennis shoes. His gaze hovered above the page for a moment, circling vulture-like, before swooping down to tear apart that which something else had already killed.

> "Elf!" cried Snodlock thickly in his gruff troll's voice. "I must have parley with you!"
>
> Freykynd looked over his shoulder, slowed, and finally stopped. Still he held aloft Cawlwyn his dagger, which he wielded with two hands like a sword. "You will have parley from that remove, troll!" snarled Freykynd softly.
>
> Snodlock halted suddenly and began nervously to wipe his fat hirsute troll's hands on his filthy apothecary's apron.
>
> "Speak, troll!" snapped Freykynd impatiently. "Speak! I am in haste to Lawdimor, where the elder demi-mages convene this midnight!"
>
> "It is precisely that," gasped Snodlock resolutely, "I mean to speak of."
>
> "Well?" shouted Freykynd.

"Dartagnan the demi-mage," hissed the troll malevolently. "He is not what he has seemed heretofore."

Freykynd tightened his grip on Cawlwyn.

Archie, in desperation, picked up his pen, changed the final period to a comma, and added: *thinking that . . .*

But he did not know what Freykynd was thinking.

He did not tell Dr. Pringle about his nightmares.

Nor did he think of them as nightmares. Nothing really nightmarish ever happened in them. He dreamt that he was called on in class and didn't know the answer. He dreamt that he was writing an A-levels but had forgotten to study. He dreamt that he was rowing but his paddle would not pierce the water. He dreamt that someone was watching him. He dreamt that something important was happening but he could not open his eyes. He dreamt that he was searching for a book that he could not find. He dreamt that he was late. He dreamt that he was lost in a dark forest. He dreamt that he was being followed.

It was not the content of the dreams that made them terrible, but the feelings that accompanied them. He felt hunted; he felt that time was running out; he felt that he was making an irrevocable mistake; he felt that all his sins were about to be made public—that he would be exposed to all the ridicule and contempt that in his weakness and ineptitude he deserved.

Archie did not tell Pringle about his dreams because it was the doctor's opinion that dreams were only clumsily disguised sexual fantasies. The (always disguised) object of Archie's sexual desire was usually, according to Pringle, Archie's mother. When Archie dared to deny an Oedipal fixation, the doctor only added homosexual longings (also disguised) to his diagnosis. So, instead of arguing, Archie took preemptive measures, concocting false dreams to bring to the sessions: drab, sterile dreams that could not possibly betray the slightest whiff of submerged longings or unconscious urges, or indeed the existence of longings or an unconscious at all.

This week, however, his hands full with Firbank and a self-guided crash course in Latin, he had forgotten to prepare a dream. He had no choice but to improvise.

He felt frozen and aphasic; he felt as if he had never in all his life dreamed and would not know a dream were he in one; so he began by saying how incredibly vivid his dream had been, how forcefully it had impressed itself on him, how really just amazingly *dreamlike* it had been. He paused dramatically, as if mustering the strength to spill his fertile secret. What did people dream about? What did *normal* people dream about?

He closed his eyes and saw himself (or someone) . . . standing. Around him was . . . nothing.

"I am in a large room," he said recklessly. "A very large room . . ."

The doctor, behind him, was silent.

"Or perhaps it's outdoors. I don't see walls or a ceiling . . ."

The doctor, behind him, grunted.

"Yes, it's outdoors. There is someone there with me . . ."

Two or three minutes later, when the doctor's grunts had become almost continuous, Archie drew to a close: "That's all I remember."

"Very revealing," Pringle said. "Yes, very revealing indeed. To begin with the room, which is at the same time not a room but the as you put it 'outdoors,' by which can only be meant the world, the universe, all of existence. A room is an enclosure, but what kind of enclosure is it that you cannot see the walls of? An enclosure, of course, that you *do not know* is an enclosure. A fish, it is said, does not see the water in which it swims. Likewise, the *unborn child* does not see the walls of the womb *as* walls. It does not know its little room *is* a little room, but takes it for the world."

Dr. Pringle, having crested this first foothill of interpretation, paused for a moment before continuing in a lower, steadier tone, like one conserving oxygen for the peak.

"That explains the appearance of the 'woman,' as you called her, who is at once your mother and not your mother. Her identity is indistinct and spectral because in this place she is both present and not present; that is, she is omnipresent—she is all around you. She is, like the walls and the ceiling

of your womb-room, everywhere and nowhere . . ."

Half an hour later, the doctor began summing up his findings in the ringing tone of a mountaineer driving home his flag: "And the significance of the breadbox—which we have seen to be an instrument of concealment, a symbol of shame—outside the expected or prescribed setting of a kitchen or pantry—which I need hardly tell you is richly associated in your unconscious mind with the mother-figure, the wife, the housewife, the *feminine*, the *female*—but instead displaced to a highly irregular context, that of the lawn —which you will recall we identified without trouble as a symbol of growth, of fecundity, of fertility, that is to say, of *procreation* or, quite simply, heterosexual intercourse—the significance of this displacement is that it reveals a deep-seated anxiety about being discovered in the classically feminine domain, that is, in the sexually passive role of the woman; and the shifting of the urge for concealment onto the lawn is obviously a feeble attempt to convince yourself of your own masculinity, your own virility, your own heterosexuality. But the breadbox, alas, is empty."

Archie had seized on a breadbox as the dullest, most commonplace object he could think of. He did not know why he had placed it on a lawn (he should have known better), except that a breadbox in a kitchen had not seemed sufficiently dreamlike. Now he objected: "But I didn't say it was empty."

"Exactly as one would expect. Any *empty* breadbox would have been too revealing, too disturbing. Even through the dream-veils of condensation, displacement, and distortion, the realization of your homosexuality would have been too distressing to face. We have discussed the function of the reaction-formation before. When you want something that you are at the same time ashamed to want, you push it out of your mind. Though there *is* no 'out of your mind'—there is only the unconscious, which receives and stores everything, like a landfill. Out of sight, perhaps, but *never* out of mind —there, in a rather clever inversion of the famous proverb, is perhaps the most succinct expression of Freud's theoretical framework. Out of sight, but never out of mind. Yes. 'Inversion,' incidentally, is another word, which Freud and Havelock Ellis among others used, for homosexuality. This *is* to

the point, for homosexuality is a kind of inverting, a turning upside-down—a reaction-formation, to use the technical term. I know you have no aversion to technical terms." The doctor grunted several times, like a hunter practicing a birdcall. "When you push something, some disgusting desire, out of your mind, you are left with a puzzling absence to explain. 'Why is it I do not care for such-and-such?' The most effective explanation, the one that will provide the greatest defense against a rebirth of the desire, is that you *hate* such-and-such. Take for example the anal retentive person who, frozen at the anal stage of psychosexual development, does not forthrightly display his enthusiasm for, as Freud puts it, 'what is unclean and disturbing and should not be part of the body,' but rather pushes these things away and becomes fixated, through the mechanism of the reaction-formation, on cleanliness, orderliness, and trustworthiness. By the same token, one of the surest indicators that someone has homosexual inclinations is the fact that he finds persons of the same sex—and, *a fortiori*, acts of homosexual intercourse—disgusting and repulsive. The clearest proof that the breadbox is empty—that your heterosexual libido is absent—is the fact that, in the dream, it is not. And now I'm afraid we've gone past time."

The problem with this explanation, thought Archie on the cab ride to the bus that would take him back to school, was that he did not find men, or other boys, especially repulsive. Did he? Well, *some* he did (he thought of Master Perkins's big greasy head, or the prefect Jelroy's cleft palate, or Fatty Roberts's fat)—but that didn't prove anything, since he also found many girls and women repulsive (the Matron came to mind). It was true that he wasn't especially *attracted* to men or boys—but wasn't that also true, by definition, of any heterosexual male?

He realized that, to refute the doctor's theory, he would have to prove that the idea of homosexuality and homosexuals did *not* especially bother him. If he was disgusted by the sight of, say, even two men kissing, then perhaps the doctor was right—perhaps he was resisting something.

"Here all right, sir?"

They had arrived at the bus stop. Archie, embarrassed by his thoughts, overtipped the cabbie and climbed out.

Having established the necessity of the thought experiment, and realizing that further delay would only be incriminating, he quickly, but nonchalantly, closed his eyes and pictured two men kissing.

He didn't like it.

Oh God—then it was true.

But hold on. He'd made the men especially manly: stout and muscular and hairy—he could almost hear their day-old stubble rasping like sandpaper when they touched . . .

So he made them younger. (This was, he assured himself, fair play: he was not especially attracted to older women either—or, without begging the question, *no one* was especially attracted to a much older person.)

This was, at first, an improvement. Yes, he could almost believe that he felt nothing, not the slightest twinge of any sexiness or (what would have been even more damning) any disgust. He was just a heterosexual watching two homosexuals express their affection; what of it? He felt no more nor less than he would have felt at the zoo watching a couple of birds feed each other or a couple of monkeys groom each other.

But his relief was short-lived. Try as he might, he could not prevent the kissers from assuming identities. His slim, blond, featureless statuary kept slipping into sudden focus, becoming one person after another like the amorphous characters in a dream; and despite himself—yes, *despite himself!* —he saw Rodney kissing Hollingsward, then Hollingsward kissing the Man-Bear, then Jelroy kissing Caulkins, then McMichaels kissing Fatty Roberts, Fatty Roberts kissing Lyle, Lyle kissing the Headmaster, the Headmaster kissing Master Perkins (oh Jesus wept!), Perkins kissing Clayton Fishpool . . .

He clamped his eyes shut as if they were sponges that could be wrung out, then opened them wide and drank in great draughts of clean, sterilizing sunlight.

This was stupid. Dr. Pringle didn't know what he was talking about. He was always going on about homosexuality; it was his *idée fixe*. Archie was

taking the man too seriously. All his mother's friends mocked their analysts. Archie, who had first been sent to Dr. Pringle when he was ten, understood that these sessions were in some way necessary and bettering, like piano lessons, chicken pox, or a visit to the dentist, and that their necessity and benefit were in some way inseparable from their unpleasantness. But if your dentist told you that your oral hygiene was deplorable, you did not take it to heart; after all, that was what he *had* to say. If Dr. Pringle hadn't decided that all Archie's problems stemmed from repressed homosexuality, he would have had to come up with some other reason for them.

"You idiot," he muttered. A fat woman waiting at the corner for her signal scowled at him; blushing, he threw himself into the perpendicular crosswalk just as the light turned yellow.

It wasn't fair: even a fat, ugly woman could make him feel stupid and inferior. That was the difference between boys and girls: only intelligent, handsome boys made him feel uneasy, while all girls, even stupid ones, even ugly ones, filled him with panic.

He crossed the street briskly, but refused to break into an undignified run. He was acutely aware, as always, of the waiting drivers' eyes on him. Like an actor getting into character, he tried to see himself as he would have liked them to see him: rangy, insouciant, wise. When he reached the opposite sidewalk he slowed his pace to show them, by contrast, just how quickly he had been moving to get out of their way.

Still blushing, his mind lashed out again at the fat woman across the street. How could anyone let herself get so fat? Then his disgust gave way to a flare-up of vicious lust: How he'd like to fuck her, the fat pig. That would teach her to scowl at him. That would teach them all.

There were not many places one could go to be alone at Parcliffe. There was the corner of the library, behind the expired periodicals, where he worked on *Freykynd*. There was the derelict lavatory in the basement of the Masters' House. (He knew it was derelict, unvisited even by Sawchins the custodian, because he had discovered in one of the toilets, lying lengthwise like a

wedding band in a jewelry box, a massive crap whose progenitor had evidently been too proud (or perhaps too traumatized) to flush; and it was still there a week later, a little furry around the edges but instantly recognizable.) And then there was the Wood.

Generations of boys had trampled the bush into a vast, alluring warren of criss-crossing paths and passageways, crawlspaces and trenches and grottoes. But, down by the muddy creek, there was a grassy clearing which, because it gave no cover, because it left nothing to the imagination, was ignored by the younger boys who came here to play war. At one end of this clearing there was a little depression, bound on one side by the creek, on the other by the trunk of a tree, and concealed from view by the tall stalks of grass that tasted like licorice when chewed. It was here that Archie came to masturbate, or, sometimes, to think.

Somehow, the open air always felt cooler and fresher on his cock than on any other part of his body. Was this just an illusion of contrast, produced by the fact that this part of his body was so seldom exposed, and therefore felt nakeder when it was? Or was the skin of this organ more sensitive than the skin elsewhere? As he pondered the matter, the wrinkled little fleshy stub came to life, increasing in size by an implausible factor till it had reached a regal stature—standing there, indeed, proud and quivering with purpose, just like a queen.

He closed his eyes and mentally perused his cousin Patricia's letters, lingering over the most nearly pornographic phrases: "I want to lick you up," "We will touch each other all over," "My hot lips yearn and ache," "I want you to crush your sweetness into me." As usual, he eked out these maddeningly vague words with phrases committed to memory from the scientific article on "intercourse" that Lyle had ripped out of the Encyclopedia last year: "Respiration becomes shallow and rapid . . . heartbeats are stronger and quicker . . . tendency to trembling, constriction of the throat, sneezing, emission of internal gas, are due to diffusion of the motor disturbance . . . dilation of the pupils, the expansion of the nostrils, the tendency to salivation and to movements of the tongue . . . movements of the tongue . . . erectile tissue charged with blood . . . perceptible to touch

in an increased degree of spongy and elastic tension . . . face becomes red, and exactly the same phenomenon takes place in the genital organs . . . the erection of the male organ which fits it to enter the female parts . . . fluid which copiously bathes all parts of the vulva . . . onset of muscular action, which is largely involuntary . . . muscular action . . . under the influence of the stimulation furnished by the contact and friction of the vagina . . . involuntary rhythmic contractions . . ."

But soon even the biological facts were swamped by a surge of emotion, and his cousin's individual features were washed away in a tide of abstraction: instead of one girl, he thought of girls in general; instead of one body, bodies in general; instead of one love, *love*. In a vision that seemed less like a dream for the future than some memory of former happiness, he saw himself on a dark desert highway, being embraced from behind by his soulmate, the beautiful genius who forgave him completely. He turned and crushed her in his arms, tore off her clothes with his teeth, carried her away, laid her down and lay down on top of her, and *had* her, *took* her, *possessed* her . . .

And yet it all remained dim and vague: she was resplendently nude but he could not quite see what she looked like; he himself was still clothed, or only half present, or half himself; and though she was soft and yielding she remained somehow pristine and inviolate, even in her subjugation.

As he made his way back through the Wood he was suddenly reminded of a similar spot he had once discovered on the edge of town outside Templeton. It too had been cross-hatched with pathways that twisted and curved out of sight in just the right way, revealing nothing of their direction or destination, enticing one irresistibly with the thrill of discovery. He prowled around in that wood like a wolf, like a panther, like the last man alive on the planet, surviving by his wits and strength alone. Then he encountered the other.

Well hiya.

Hi.

Hail fellow nature-lover well met and all that jazz I'm sure.

There was something furtive and smug about the man, as if he had expected to find someone like Archie in a place like this.

I was taking a shortcut, Archie explained. The words caught in his throat and betrayed a sudden, inexplicable guilt.

The man was blocking the path, and made no move to step aside. *In a hurry?* he asked, his voice rich with amusement and knowingness.

Bloody right, said Archie, and turned and fled.

At the time, his guilt and shame, so seemingly groundless, had bewildered and angered him. But now, at last, he understood their origin.

That wood had been on the same end of town as the public toilets.

Homosexual men often made dates with one another in public toilets (indeed, while standing at the urinals, if some of the books he'd read could be believed).

The man in the wood had been a homosexual. A homosexual had made a pass at him.

Surely, of all people on the planet, it was homosexuals who were most attuned to the telltale signs of homosexuality in others.

Did the man know something that Archie did not?

"Come in, come in, whoever you are," sang a voice distinctly not Fishpool's. Archie looked again at the number on the door, then pushed it manfully open, an explanation ready on his lips: *Sorry, old cock, I thought these were C. S. Fishpool's rooms . . .*

But the words died before they were born. At the sight of the naked boy on the bed, apparently trying to twist himself into a pretzel, Archie fell speechless.

"Come on you bastard, close the door will you?"

Though run together, the two parts of this sentence were uttered in such radically different tones—the first part growled, the second part tinkled—that they seemed to come from different personalities altogether. Archie shut the door.

The "bastard," as a compulsive second glance revealed, was the boy's

leg: he was trying to get a look at the bottom of his foot. The second glance also revealed that the boy was not in fact fully naked, but wore a white towel around his waist which nevertheless, in his present posture, completely failed to conceal any part of his anatomy whatsoever.

"I *think* I've got another *bas*tard of a *wart*," said the boy, jumping from one end of his register to the other and back in the space of "bastard" alone. "Can *you* see the cunt?"

With simulated naturalness Archie kept his gaze averted, looking with roving absorption at every object and furnishing in the room. "I wouldn't know what one looks like," he said regretfully, so that the boy would not think that his wartlessness was for him a source of pride or superiority.

"Like a little prick of an asshole of a wart right on the bastard bottom of your asshole *foot*."

Archie, like an amnesiac clutching at some inconsequential but precious memory, shouted, "I think I've probably got the wrong room."

"Fishie's in the bog; he'll be out. I can *feel* him, the cunt. Just look. Here. *Please*."

Archie turned his head far enough to see that the boy had fallen back on his elbows and extended his long pink leg, with all its toes wriggling, in Archie's direction.

"It could very well be a wart."

"No, but come on. It's not contagious to *look* at. It won't hurt you to *look*, will it?"

He thought of his session with Dr. Pringle. He looked at the boy's foot.

It was easy, after all, not to stare down the leg at the exposed groin; he'd had plenty of practice in the locker room. Encouraged, he even grabbed the boy's ankle to steady it. But the pink skin, which he'd expected to be warm and clammy, was as cool and dry as a corpse. He dropped it at the sound of Fishpool's voice.

"Is Deivers going on about his ineffable bloody warts again?"

Archie felt a sinking panic, as if he had been dropped into a foreign city, as if this moment did not connect to any other moment of his life.

"It does look like a wart," he said. "But one never knows."

"I'll cut it off," wailed Deivers, rolling back and forth on the bed. "I'll cut the whole damn cunt of a foot right *off*."

"Oh *poo*," said Fishpool. To Archie he said, "Let's away."

"Are we . . . Is he not . . ."

"No. Deivers isn't literary."

"The distinction between form and content," one boy in an ascot was saying to another boy in socks and sandals, "is an insidious one. You cannot say *what* a poem says without saying it *the way* the poem says it."

"In other words," said another boy wearily, "*form has content*. No argument here. But can the inverse be said? Does *content* have *form*?"

"Ah—*pétition principe*. You are still treating them as distinct entities. Content *cannot* be extracted; meaning *cannot* be abstracted. A paraphrase is not the same as a poem. A synopsis is a lie."

Archie nodded and grumbled his agreement. It was the only response he'd managed to muster since their arrival.

"But then," someone else was saying, "as Lucretius so aptly put it, you will not feel death because you will not be. By the same token, you will not feel fame either."

"Lucretius is overrated as a philosopher—underrated as a poet."

"Ah!—but it is the desire of posthumous fame that inspires one to create great works of art in the here and now."

"The here and now is overrated. No one lives there anymore."

"Ah!—but!—the esteem of future generations, as Seneca so felicitously phrased it, is no more valuable than that of the present one!"

"Give it to us in Latin, Bowling."

"One little known fact about Seneca is that he often spoke a lot of balls."

"Often speaking a lot of balls is underrated."

Archie laughed with the others, but this only made him feel more excluded, like a ghost excluded from the gaiety of those he haunts, which he can never hope to contribute to.

He saw now that Fishpool was speaking: ". . . On the other hand, you can't rule it out entirely."

Archie felt harpooned with awe and envy. To be the sort of person who always knew what to say, and at just the right moment! When he looked at Fishpool as an example of what he himself was not, Archie almost hated him.

"I need solitude for my writing," someone was saying. "As Kafka said, not 'like a hermit,' but like a dead man."

"Firbank was a hermit, wasn't he?"

"That's *one* word for what he was, yes."

Archie glanced at Fishpool, but he seemed not to have heard. But a minute later he stood, and the other members of the Club fell silent.

It was time for the story.

"One summer, when I was thirteen, my parents got into their heads the notion that I was in need of a tutor. Nor was this notion completely unfounded, I must confess. I was not exactly, at that time, setting the world afire. The fact was that my interests had begun to migrate outside the academic realm. I was thirteen. Perhaps you know what I mean.

"Money, as always among the Fishpools, was scarce. My parents could not afford a 'proper' tutor, but had to cast their flimsy net among the teaching trainees at the local college. I gathered that only one candidate had, for the rate they could offer, presented herself to their scrutiny. I overheard my parents discussing this candidate's qualifications one night. Wasn't she too young? my mother worried. My father agreed, but the advanced state of my nescience left them no choice; in spite of their reservations, the girl was hired.

"As if deliberately to combat my parents' fears, 'Eileen,' as I will call her, acted not like the seventeen-year-old girl that she was but a sexagenarian schoolmarm. She dressed like a matron and ruled like a martinet. Not a day went by without her finding some excuse to slap my hand with her ruler. The most common indictment was inattention. If the

object of my alleged inattention was my schoolwork, I plead guilty; but emphatically not guilty, if the object was my tutor. Despite her formidable demeanor, there was no question but that she was the most exquisitely lovely creature I had ever laid eyes on. It was the most delicious torture to sit beside her day after day, pretending to grapple with algebraic functions or dangling participles while in fact grappling with the overwhelming urge to take into my arms and grapple with Eileen.

"Nor was she blind to my misery—I made sure of that. I called her cruel, vicious, uncaring, cold; she feigned to believe that I referred only to her pedagogy. I asked if she treated all men this way; she slapped my hands for my impertinence. I began to find these slaps strangely pleasurable. It was as if the ruler were an extension of her flesh. I became more impertinent, inciting her to more frequent thrashings, and trembled in anticipation when she reached for the instrument; at night in bed I caressed the smarting welts that blossomed on the backs of my hands. She understood what I was up to, but saw no way to relent without acknowledging the passion that underlay my impudence. She was committed to her course of action, as I was to mine. More than once I provoked her to the brink of tears. I was shameless; I was in love.

"Then my parents went away on holiday. My scholastic performance had not improved; as punishment, they left me at home, alone with my tutor, to study.

"By the second day we were both utterly frazzled. I refused even to pretend to work, and she, for her part, abandoned all attempt to control me. Even the ruler disappeared. Instead of liberating me, this rather intimidated me. Had I gone too far? I teased her; she made no reply. I jabbed my pencil at my books; she took no notice. We sat in agonized silence, heads hanging, frozen with fear—each frightened of what the other would do.

"When, after an eternity, I looked up, I perceived that she had been weeping. Quite thoughtlessly, I put my hand on hers. A spasm, as of malaria, shook her thin frame, and tears began to roll down her cheeks. She looked at me then, and I saw that her eyes, though moist, were not sad.

"'Oh Clayton,' she said, 'we mustn't . . .'"

Archie, who had been listening raptly, captivated as much by Fishpool's eloquence and self-possession as by the tale itself, noticed that some of the boys in the circle were fidgeting. Now one of them stood and, moving with exaggerated delicacy, like an usher in an opera house, went to the door and locked it. Another withdrew something from beneath his chair.

Archie felt a stirring of panic: something was about to happen, and he wouldn't know what to do.

"I told her that it was not wrong, that nothing that two people both wanted so badly could be wrong. She smiled at me then—and it was as though she had doffed all her schoolmarm's sternness. She shook her head as if shaking off a dream. She had regained possession of herself, but no longer had to smother anything, or lock anything of herself away. She grasped my hand firmly and led me to the bed, saying, 'But you must not forget that in this, as in all things, I remain your *tutor*.'"

Another boy withdrew something from under his chair, and another. Archie saw that they were readying their towels. He felt a flood of relief that spilled over into gratitude; though Fishpool had not told him what the towel was for, he *had* told him to bring one. Archie rummaged in his book bag for his.

"I applied myself to her instructions with a fervor that I had never shown in scholastic pursuits. And, as our passions mounted and intermingled like the smoke of two cigarettes climbing towards the ceiling, a strange inversion occurred. I, for one ineffable moment, became the tutor, and she the pupil. I taught her the calculus of pleasure, showed her how to bridge the split infinitive of joy. I clutched her like a pencil, spun her like a protractor, measured her every dimension with my ruler—repeatedly, patiently, pedagogically. She gasped; she understood; she saw the light.

"Like the Jabberwock," Fishpool concluded, "she burbled as she came."

There was no applause, no plaudits, not even any smiles. It was as if they had all been waiting impatiently for him to finish. Fishpool left the pages of his address on the podium and returned to his seat without a word. Without a word, the towels were unfurled and laid on the floor at the center

of the circle, like the long petals of a flower. Then, without a word, the boys of the Literary Club unbuttoned their trousers.

Archie followed suit. He draped his pants over the back of his chair; he sat on the edge of his towel, facing the others; he spread his legs and grabbed his cock—which he was alarmed, then relieved, to find fully erect.

Afterwards, the boys put on their pants, rolled up their towels, and proceeded to mingle and chat as if nothing extraordinary had occurred. "I thought C.S.'s story this week rather good, didn't you?" "Have you read the new Isherwood?" "When's the bloody *Lyre* deadline anyway?"

He was reminded of parties of his mother's, when someone had puked in a vase, or broken the punch bowl, or begun weeping in the bathroom, or pawed at the wrong person, and so had to be politely shown the door. This fall into disgrace always marked the climax of the party, but the guests lingered awhile through the dénouement, chatting extra loudly, grinning extra brightly, mixing their drinks extra strong, as if to deny that anything disgraceful had happened at all.

Archie, who wished for nothing more than to disappear, found himself consistently not alone. A steady file of boys came round to introduce themselves, shake his hand, welcome him to the Club. They asked him questions: "What's your stance on rhyme, Archer?" "Archer, how do you feel about this Beat thing?" "Have you read the new Isherwood?" Gone now was the frosty atmosphere of the symposium; but, friendly as they were, he could not clear from his mind the image of what they had all just done.

"Say, Archer, what's your favorite poem? I know, I know—but if you *had* to pick one."

He struggled to think of the title, or indeed existence, of a single poem. He remembered *Don Juan*, but wasn't sure that something so lengthy qualified as a poem. Could he get away with something like Shakespeare's Sonnet 163?

"Well, if I had to pick *one*, I guess it would have to be 'The Windhover,'" he said, recalling the quantity of praise that Master Royd had

heaped on a poem by that name in Advanced English last year.

"Manley Hopkins, eh?" The boy lifted his brows, as if impressed by Archie's audacity. "How about that. Old manly Manley Hopkins."

Ms. Hastings looked up from her knitting and smiled warmly. As one of the few women on staff at Parcliffe, and the only one under forty, it was perhaps strange that the librarian had so utterly failed to inflame the ardor of the student body. Though amicable and by no means deformed, she was nevertheless not only thoroughly unsexy but downright unsexual. It was simply not conceivable that she could be the owner of organs of procreation. (Though Archie had to admit that he could not muster much faith in the existence of, for instance, his cousin Patricia's vagina, either.)

Today, he keenly resented Ms. Hastings's sexlessness. It seemed an ambiguity expressly designed to confuse and dismay him, like a bit of doggerel introduced into an otherwise intelligible play.

"Title, author, or subject?"

He was prepared for this. "Subject, please. I'm looking for information —whatever I can find—I don't know if you'll have anything—on *honorary degrees*."

But she was unwilling to deviate from the script: "Under what letter, please?"

"H, please."

"H what?"

"What?"

"H what? H-A, H-E, H-O, what?"

"Oh. H-O, please."

"H-O what?"

"H-O, um, well, N, I guess. H-O-N."

"In that case our choices are two. We've got Homo to Hone or Hone to Hot."

His heart sank. His eyeballs started to tremble.

"What are we looking for again?"

"Honorary degrees." His mouth was too fast for his brain.

"That's easy, then. We'll be wanting Hone to Hot."

"Well yes and hominids too, if possible. It's a sort of anthropological angle that I'm taking to . . . honorary degrees."

"Then we'll be wanting Hoc to Homo. 'Hominid' is with an I, isn't it?"

"Well, yes. However," he went on, his speech slowing to a panic-stricken crawl, "it just occurred to me that it's not *hominids* it's likely to be under but, come to think of it, more likely, ah, homonyms."

Ms. Hastings put her hands on where her hips would be if she'd had hips. "With an O?"

"With an O, yes."

"H-O-M-O, *homo.* As in *homo*-nyms."

"Yes."

"Then it's not Hoc to Homo that you're wanting at all, but Homo to Hone."

"I guess you're right."

After an epic search in which something more esoteric than mere alphabetization must have been involved, she lugged the two drawers over to the counter and dumped them with a grunt. Then she waited.

He attacked Hone to Hot first. There was nothing for "honorary degrees." The nearest heading was "honorary titles," but that said "See: Titles of honor and nobility"—and he was not about to ask to see the Tit to Todg (or whatever) drawer. Instead he turned to "honorifics" and jotted down call numbers with one of the stubby, never-to-be-sharpened pencils provided. He lingered a little longer, riffling forward and backward through the cards with a scholar's conscientiousness, so that Ms. Hastings's effort might not seem so inordinate. He gave her a quick smile, like a man who takes such easy-going pleasure in his innocent task that he positively welcomes observers; then he turned to Homo to Hone.

He pulled forward half the cards and found himself staring at "homosexuality—mythology." Panicking, he jumped to the back of the drawer and loitered for a while amid "Honduras" and "Hondschoote, Battle of, 1793." Making a thoughtful face, as of a yokel contemplating a manual

transmission, he pushed back all but one inch of the cards and was rewarded with "homo erectus." He felt himself blushing, and flipped quickly forward through "homocysteine—pathophysiology," "homogenization (differential equations)," "homografts (moral and ethical aspects)," and "homologous organs (see also Anatomy, comparative)," before pausing, without quite remembering why, at "homonyms." Had Ms. Hastings gone back to her knitting? He didn't dare look up. He pretended to write down a call number, then realized that it would be just as easy to copy out a real one. This done, he leapt forward, landing on "homosexuality and literature—France—20th century." Time was slipping away. He flipped madly through "homosexuality, female (see also Lesbians)," "homosexuality, female—fiction (see also Lesbians—fiction)," "homosexuality—folklore," "homosexuality—in animals," and "homosexuality—religious aspects" before it occurred to him that he was moving further away from the generic category. What must Ms. Hastings be thinking? He could imagine the censorious scowl coming over her normally affable features, the look of disgust as she began to wonder what malicious, plagiaristic, or pornographic use he was putting her poor card catalogue to. He jumped back—too far: "homophile movement," "homophobia—history," "homoptera," "homoscedacity." She must know, from his place in the drawer, what he was up to. He jumped forward—too far: "homosexuality—law and legislation," "homosexuality—miscellanea," "homosexuality—mythology." Back where he started! Enough!

"All done?" she asked dazedly, as if she had just been wakened from a lovely dream.

One evening on his way back to his House from the Wood, he saw someone coming towards him across the quad.

It was Clayton Fishpool. He did not want to talk to Clayton Fishpool.

So he changed his direction, but subtly: He did not want to be seen, but he did not want to be seen wanting not to be seen, either.

Had Fishpool spotted him? It was dusk; perhaps he had not. But he was

getting closer. And each of Archie's own steps only brought him nearer. He did not dare swerve off to one side or (what he most wanted to do) turn and go back the way he had come. He had to content himself with slight, imperceptible deflections. Gradually he veered away from the encounter.

But still Fishpool came his way! He had altered his course to compensate for Archie's drift. Or had he? Maybe Fishpool had been walking in this direction all along, and it was Archie who had inadvertently put himself in his path. Or maybe he *had* changed his course, but for some other, innocent reason; maybe he'd remembered someplace else he was supposed to be.

No, it was impossible! Even as Archie turned more and more sharply, till he must have looked like a tilting drunkard, Fishpool continued to stroll directly toward him. Archie walked a little faster. If Fishpool saw him speed up, then all pretences would have to be dropped—the chase would be on.

Fishpool was not fooled. Fishpool was keeping pace. Worse than that, he was gaining. Archie could *feel* him getting closer, though he dared not turn his head. He could feel the boy's proximity, like the heat from a fire, on the side of his face and the back of his neck. And the heat was increasing.

It was unbearable. He broke into a run.

But his legs were blocks of wood. In no time at all Fishpool was upon him; he drew his sword. Archie reached for his own dagger, but it would not come free of its scabbard. Fishpool stabbed him in the back. Archie screamed and fell to his knees. Fishpool ran him through from behind, again and again, until at last a red geyser of blood shot out the top of his head.

"No," he told the doctor, "no dreams. None that I can remember."

According to Freud, or anyway according to Archie's reading of Freud, the typical homosexual felt too much love for his (too-loving) mother; but instead of giving in to that Oedipal urge, he denied it, clamping down on it so hard that he ended up convinced that he hated not only his own mother

but all of womankind.

This story, however, did not exhaust the possibilities. The homosexual might alternatively devote himself so wholeheartedly to his loving mother that he found it necessary to shun all her (female) competitors. If the mother refused to conform to the pattern, giving too little instead of too much love to her son, the son simply developed a compensatory attachment to his father, and (through him) all fathers. If there was no father around to form an attachment to, the son could take one of two routes to homosexuality: he could, in the absence of a male role model, become effeminate and feminized; or he could develop a compensatory attachment to other father-figures—other men.

Each of these stories sounded plausible enough in isolation. The question was, how did anyone ever arrive at *heterosexuality*? Some boys must emerge, unscathed as it were, from the same conditions of family life that produced homosexuals. Growing up without a father (as Archie had) or being fond of your mother (as Archie supposed he was) were perhaps necessary causes, but not sufficient ones, surely.

Adler did not have much to say about the origin of homosexuality, but confined himself to describing "the most salient traits of the homo-sexual." These were "inordinate ambition" and "extraordinarily pronounced caution" (or "fear of life"): "The attitude of the homosexual toward life will always be a *hesitating one*."

Archie felt a sinking in his guts. He was nothing if not hesitating. Or was he? Perhaps he was only cautious. Was his caution really "extraordinarily pronounced"? He did not think so. Or did he?

It didn't matter: "Inordinate ambition" was even more incriminating. Did he not, after all, believe himself to be earmarked for greatness? Had he not often drifted into daydreams of what it would be like to be recognized, famous, admired? Had he not already determined the library call number that his *Freykynd* would receive? And homosexuals, according to Adler, utilized their "different experiences" to "give strength to the belief that they are different from other children. This difference appears to them in the nature of a *distinction*—a view-point that their ambition of course willingly

encourages." Archie thought this way every day! Deep down, he treated the fact that he was not like all the other stupid and stuck-up boys as cause for pride, not shame. If he was lousy at sports (forgetting for the moment tennis and swimming), it was because he was an *intellectual*. If he had no friends (forgetting for the moment Lyle and Clayton Fishpool), it was because his soul moved on a more elevated plane. If he had never had any luck with girls (and taking the awkward kiss with his cousin Patricia fully into account), it was because he was a gentleman, or because he was too choosy, or because . . . because . . .?

"Hey Archer, you're literary aren't you?"

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"How do you spell 'persuasion'?"

Archie told him. "What are you writing?"

"An essay for Rhetoric." Rodney gathered up the pages, tapped them into order on the desktop, and cleared his throat. "It's called: 'The Art of Persuasion.'"

Hollingsward, jackknifed over his bed in a posture of debilitating boredom, lifted his head and cried, "That's the topic, and you don't even know how to *spell* it? We're going to be here all night."

"I'm just putting the finishing touches on it. Hey Archer, how do you spell 'subtle'?"

"Let me see that."

> The Art of Persuasion
> by Rodney de van der Mullens (III)
> The art of persuasion tries to change the heart and mind and therefore is a powerful tool that can altar views. The art of persuasion can be a suttle or direct tool but either ways it plays on the emotions and the change of view resulting from the persuasion is usually long lasting. Persuasion is an art because it is every where in our environment and it effects the decisions that we make every day in our life. My trip to New York last summer also

> resulted out of persuasion. I was hesitant to go but persuasion occurred and through revealing the opportunity is now, guilting me to obligations, and highlighting all the benefits I was persuaded to go.

It was worse than he would have thought possible. To conceal his dismay, he let out a long dismayed whistle. "You'd better give me your pen."

As he began circling the solecisms and underlining the misspellings that appeared in the first sentence, Rodney grew uneasy.

"Some of that's a matter of taste though, right? Personal preference?"

"No." Archie put down the pen. "You're going to have to rewrite the whole thing."

Hollingsward let out a yelp.

"*My cock*," Rodney sighed. To Caulkins and Hollingsward he said, "Hell, you guys go on without me."

Hollingsward raised his eyebrows at Caulkins, who held up one index finger. When at last he opened his mouth, it was to belch the word *oligarchy*. Then he rose to his feet. "Works for me."

Hollingsward sprang to life and clapped Rodney on the shoulder. "We'll keep them warmed up for you."

"Where are you going?," Archie asked.

"Oh, just into town."

"Yes?"

"It's Thursday."

"And what happens on Thursday?"

"Are you kidding?" Rodney looked at him earnestly, as if deciding between pity and admiration. "Thursday's when Downsfield lets out, man."

"And nubile tarts are free to roam the earth," intoned Caulkins sacerdotally, "and seek out the hot young willing cock."

Hollingsward tugged at his arm. "Come on come on, Mullens said he'd catch up."

Archie looked at the essay on the desk. "I guess it would probably be easier for me to fix myself."

Rodney looked at him.

"I mean, I'd be doing most of the work myself anyway. There's no point in both of us . . ."

"Now *that's* the ticket!" said Hollingsward, slapping Archie's shoulder.

Rodney took his hand and shook it, then seemed embarrassed by the gesture. "You're a good cock, Arch," he said, without meeting his eye.

"Go on," said Archie, feeling rather like the eunuch persuading the sultan to have a little fun for a change.

When they were gone, he wondered what had come over him. He hadn't wanted them to leave. He hadn't wanted to be left alone with his thoughts, which had been spinning around the same track for so long that they were making him nauseous. Was he hopelessly self-destructive, or did he just relish the role of martyr? He didn't think he did. But did he?

Perhaps he was playing a new part, trying it on for size: The lonely homosexual, unable to derive pleasure from the same coarse pursuits as his peers, stays home and distracts himself with his airy lucubrations . . .

Or perhaps he had not wanted to be left alone with Rodney? But that was ridiculous. Even if he *was* a homo, surely Rodney was not his type. Surely he would be attracted to someone like Clayton Fishpool, someone intelligent, and attractive, and—

"Those guys are dicks."

Archie blenched, as if his thoughts had been visible.

"Let's get this motherfucker done," said Rodney, almost shyly, from the doorway. "Then let's go into town and rustle up some quim."

"The thing about women," said Rodney astutely, "is that they act like they're in control, but what they really want is to be controlled."

Archie nodded, astutely sucking Cherry Coke through his straw. "They behave so cool and superior but meanwhile all they really need is somebody to take charge."

"It's biological basically," said Rodney. "Their *mode opérant* is basically nurturing. So it makes sense that they're looking for someone to protect

them, someone to provide for them."

"Someone to bring home the bacon."

"Someone to slip them the salami."

Archie didn't know what to say to this. Earlier, when a pack of Downsfield girls had come into the diner and ordered malteds, Rodney had said, with something like sickened awe, "What I couldn't do with a pair of gazongas like that." This kind of statement always rendered Archie speechless. What *did* one do with a pair of gazongas? Or, for that matter, a nice set of legs or a smashing ass? He understood the sentiment behind such comments: "That girl is physically attractive to me." It was their peculiar figurative expression, half nonsensical, half obscene, that bemused him, as if Rodney were speaking in some kind of childish masonic code. And when he himself tried to speak this language it always rang false. He simply could not say things like "I wouldn't kick *her* out of bed" or "Now *there's* a can I could drink from" without feeling like an imposter, or a troll. Although, in fact, he felt that way—guilty, dirty, stupid—whenever he even looked at a pretty girl. No doubt some prehistoric part of him longed to subdue and degrade her, pull her by the hair back to his cave. Probably that was why the salacious words turned to ashes in his mouth: shame.

But most of the time, talking to Rodney was easy. Archie did not have to try so hard. Not that Rodney was stupid; he could not spell, perhaps, but he had life smarts. And the two of them had a lot in common. Rodney too was the only child of a widowed mother. He too had transferred to Pervcliffe, just last year. He too had hated it at first.

"One summer," Archie said, "when I was about thirteen, my mother got it into her head that I needed a tutor. Of course, you can't really blame her . . ."

Rodney leaned back and nodded nonchalantly in the direction of the door. Two Downsfielders had just come in.

"Nice," Archie mumbled.

He recognized the brunette.

She was the one he sometimes saw in his vision, embracing him from behind on that lonesome desert road.

"Ask them to join us."

"Are you crazy?"

"Wait here."

Archie could not watch. He hung his head over his plate and stuffed cold french fries in his mouth.

"Hey, you haven't met my roommate Arch yet, have you? Ladies, this is Arch my roommate. Arch my roommate, this is Sandra. And this is Meagan, my future ex-wife."

The girls laughed obligingly, as if they had already heard this joke but were too polite to say so. Archie saw with horror that he had extended his hand in greeting; now it hung in the air above the table, unnoticed, unacknowledged, irrefutable proof of his awkwardness. Did one even shake hands with girls? He grasped the ketchup bottle, as if this had been his goal all along, just as the girl of his dreams held out her hand to him.

"Hi Arch his roommate, I'm Sandra his future ex-wife's future ex-roommate."

Archie rangily upended the bottle, insouciantly slapped half a pint of ketchup onto his plate, and grinned wisely up at the girl of his dreams. Through a mouthful of half-chewed french fries he said, "Peeaarreeaagghh." He tried again, this time with greater emphasis: "*Pee*aarr*ee*agghh." The girl furrowed her brow and leaned closer. He felt the sweat break out on his back. He looked wildly at Rodney, who looked wildly at him. The other girl eyed him with remote distaste, as if she had picked him up on the sole of her shoe on her way to a wedding. The mass of sodden potato in his mouth seemed, meanwhile, to have expanded, so that smiling rangily or insouciantly or in any other way was out of the question; the best that he could manage, by waggling his eyebrows and bringing his lips together, was a sour, maniacal moue. Recognizing that the only way out of this predicament was to chew, he abandoned all attempts at non-verbal communication and began madly to chew. Then he bit his tongue.

Why did he do that?

Why did one bite one's tongue? Presumably because one was afraid of what one was about to say. What had he been about to say? Something stupid and inadequate, no doubt. But if his secret motive had been to avoid looking stupid, he surely could not have hit upon a worse solution than screaming in agony, spewing bloody mush from his mouth, and galumphing out into the night. Either his unconscious was even stupider than he was, or his problems went deeper than he realized.

Perhaps it was not the girl he'd been afraid of, but himself. What would he have discovered if he'd allowed himself to spend even a few minutes in conversation with a pretty girl? That he didn't care? That he wasn't nervous? That he was afraid to be around girls not because he might make an ass of himself, but because it might not matter if he did? Maybe what he really felt around beautiful girls was not love, but terrifying, vertiginous indifference.

But that didn't make any sense either, because, by the doctor's logic, an indifference to the opposite sex would only point to a repressed attraction to them. But no: to qualify as a reaction-formation, wouldn't it have to be stronger than mere indifference, something more like active hatred or repugnance? Unless, of course, it was possible to form a reaction-formation *to* a reaction-formation. Perhaps he so loved women that the sight of a pretty girl crippled him; disgusted by this weakness, he clamped down on it so hard that his lust underwent a subterranean transformation into loathing; but, being even more ashamed of his loathing than he had been of his lust, he clamped down again, until his troll-like, rapacious, destructive urges were refined into commonplace lust and wretched infatuation . . .

But if one could form a reaction-formation to a reaction-formation, what prevented one from forming a reaction-formation to a reaction-formation to a reaction-formation? What prevented infinite regress? And more importantly, how did one ever discover one's true feelings? A loop had no starting point.

All he knew for certain was that he had not *meant* to bite his tongue. His unconscious, apparently, did not want him talking to girls.

Archie returned to the library and to "A Song of Myself," which Clayton Fishpool had brought to his attention as one of the best poems ever written —"in the English language, at least." Archie had perceived its brilliance the first time he read it. To think that someone had thought to write such long, unrhymed lines as long ago as 1858! And he liked the idea of grass as the "beautiful uncut hair of graves." That was poetry, all right.

But his second reading left him discomfited. There was an awful lot of talk of men, for one thing. Men, to Archie's way of thinking, were (like automobiles, politics, and wheelbarrows) not quite proper subject matter for poetry. But Whitman gave them as much attention as women, perhaps more. And what could be made of lines like these?

> I am enamoured of growing outdoors,
> Of men that live among cattle or taste of the ocean or woods . . .
> I can eat and sleep with them week in and week out.

On his first reading, he had chalked this sort of thing up to the innocence of earlier times: Whitman could not have known what people would one day mean when they said "sleep with" someone. But how did Whitman know what men tasted like? Was this just poetry—that is, saying what you didn't mean, not saying what you did mean—or was this something else?

Let's be blunt, he said to himself. *Let's cut to the chase*. *Let's not mince words.*

It was possible that Walt Whitman had been a homosexual. Many famous writers had been. (He could not at the moment think of any, aside from Oscar Wilde.) One could enjoy their works without being homosexual oneself. Though possibly it helped . . .

Was Clayton Fishpool a homosexual? Was that why he had befriended Archie, invited him to join the Literary Club? Because he had recognized in him a kindred spirit?

Just like the man in the wood outside Templeton.

But that was different. Archie had been, after all, in that wood on the edge of town near the public toilets, a known meeting place for homosexuals. The man could perhaps be forgiven his assumption.

Well, what if Clayton Fishpool had made a similar mistake?

From the stacks, Archie pulled every book by Lytton Strachey the library owned and returned with them to his carrel. He did not believe he would find what he was looking for. After all, it wasn't the sort of detail you could expect to find in a scholarly introduction or the biographical note on the dust jacket. He had already resigned himself to the futility of his task when he came upon, in *Lytton Strachey by Himself*, an autobiographical essay that quickly came to the point:

> Perhaps if I could have lain with Bunny . . . And then I smiled to think of my romantic visions before coming—of a recrudescence of that affair, under Duncan's nose—and of his dimness on my arrival, and of how very very little I wanted to lie with him now!

There could no be question of what "lie with" meant here—not with "romantic visions" and "that affair" in the same sentence. But he read on, just to be sure.

As the first flush of victory at having confirmed a wild hypothesis began to fade, it was replaced by an at first pleasurable, then disquieting, shock of recognition. For, in many ways, Strachey was exactly like him, he was exactly like Strachey: indecisive, self-doubting, filled with daydreams and velleities, addicted to introspection and to self-dramatization: "I imagined myself reading about myself in a novel by Tolstoy—reading quickly, and turning over the pages as fast as I could, in my excitement to know what would happen in the end."

But as he read on, the shock of recognition faded too, and with it the worry about what it might portend, what it might prove about Clayton Fishpool or about himself.

> And then the vision of that young postman with the fair hair and lovely country complexion who had smiled at me and said 'Good evening, sir,' as he passed on his bicycle, flashed upon me. My scheme of meeting him in the long lane past the village recurred to me, and then I began embroidering romantic and only *just* possible adventures which might

follow: the bedroom in the inn at Norwich, and all the rest. But there was the necessity of talking to him first; and I went once more through the calculations of time and place, and saw that my plan really might, if I had the nerve, come off . . .

He read quickly, turning over the pages as fast as he could, to find out what would happen next.