

MOORE'S PARADOX

Teague Morris

GRAVITY

The torturous black cube that dropped
into the glistening hollow ocean and bobbed
once, twice, then sank, pulled under
by the ropy slickened arms of an octopus
or perhaps the elusive giant squid, was, in fact,
the only necessary thing ever to have been.
In its meandering alleys there was every place
that anyone ever needed to go, every sound
that ever needed to be heard, every skeleton
that ever needed to be given a robe of flesh.
It was hard to tell what it was, from far away
on the shore where we sat, crunching shrimp
and pounding down some neon slushy substance
because it sort of looked like nothing, at first,
before your mind really got ahold of it
and it swept you along its winding voluptuousness
like you had come to a very distant planet
whose surface was hounded into dunes
by the teething wind; maybe it was some flotsam
that had collected and festered, or an artifact
from deep beneath the waves, in the avenues
of the fleshy white worms and eyeless crabs,
the deposited bones of the dinosaurs turned oil-slick
or, perhaps, a god from before all this. At any rate
it reminded us of the way everything wanted
in its heart of hearts, to jam itself up against everything else
until the universe was a single mass
like a ball of yarn with arms and legs

MOORE'S PARADOX

One day I am standing outside by a tree. I look across the standing field and I see someone coming and the way they compress the air in front. And I feel a bit sad because there is nothing for me to give them. Nothing in any direction.

It is impossible for me to say that they are coming and that I believe that they are not coming. Or if not impossible, at least a bit odd. And yet I can't shake the feeling that there is no one there, that the shadow among the rows of corn is only mine.

I can feel the tree behind me like an empty plastic container the top of which fits on perfectly. I am the top. Or maybe the other person is coming to be the top. Also—I forgot to mention—there is a blackbird who lives in the branches of the tree and calls all morning.

The blackbird flutters down to the ground. He lets out a thoughtful squawk. It means *I believe that this person is an automaton*. But he is not an automaton. Or at least if he is one I made him so. I can't tell from this distance if his arms are ragged enough.

Now I can tell: the way he moves his arms is funny, but maybe not funny enough to be a robot. When I picture other people I can never shake the feeling that everyone else could be compared to a certain breed of dog. I wonder if other people picture me that way, fetching newspapers.

The other person and I are inside now. We sit at a table and make a game of pretending the other person isn't there. The blackbird keeps score by beating his beak on the table which is made of steel. I'm not sure if I'm allowed to leave. I ask the other person if he knows what it's like to be a dog.

I develop a coded system for referring to the things
that the blackbird sees. I write them in chalk. I ask
the other person if he knows what I am doing.
He barks and wags his tail. I record this in the notebook
the way the blackbird sees it: *Subject 1 not really a person.*

I ask him if he knows if it will rain Tuesday. He tells me
that he doesn't know, but he thinks it will. I ask him
how it started raining in the test-chamber. He shrugs
and goes back to his ball-game. I resume imagining
that he is an automaton with the eyes of a human being.

There is a tape spooling somewhere I can't see. I pretend
that every time I hear it click, a photograph is taken
of the tree and us in the room. Over the course of the photographs
you can see the tree turn bone-white. And you can see the two of us
expanding until we fill up the room with our staring.

I feel like the other person is growing leaves. And I
might catch fire at any moment. He tries to tell me again
that it's not raining in the room and I just look at him
until my skin begins to crisp. The tape clicks again.
The blackbird has turned into a trash can.

OCEAN LIFE

I am living underwater. Some days, it's nice to sit and watch the coral reefs turn slowly into garbage: they accumulate little bits of plastic that people casually throw into the ocean, and shining things, parts of watches, gears, earrings wedding rings nobody ever wore, eyes, jewels, fingernail clippings. It all piles up, until the fish can't breathe anymore, and then they turn into the coral. Other days, I try to find a shark, and follow him around silently without him noticing; you have to think like a shark, at least a little bit, to do it right, all that winding back and forth, back and forth, because if you stop you'll sink, and you haven't got any bones to stop you from becoming part of the sea-floor. Most days, though, I try to stop the sea from getting out all over everything. There seems to be quite a bit of it, and if, for example, it slipped while I was trying to carry it egglike across the aisle of a supermarket, it might expand so rapidly that everything would be swallowed in a single mouthing instant; the shopping carts would float up to the top, and the people, who are heavier, would sink down into the pink and smiling graves of the fish, while the oranges just hang there, right about at head height.

THE ROOM AND DOG

The walls are bare. Black all around. But there is a red haze creeping in at the edges. People are there, on all sides, blue and murky as if underwater. Hair floats up, dishevels, forms clouds through which fish may fly. A hand reaches. The light catches in it, and ignites the silver bones. Mouths gape revealing darkness in darkness. Echoes from the cavern walls loose things, call the people who live in the tunnels forth. Golden, the skeletons amass: a slow circle is inscribed on the floor. They begin to light the books aflame, watching with hooded eyes. The walls press in. Another layer is peeled away, and tinged clouds begin to form on the tile. Water dripping from the whispering circuits pools and fish begin to grow there, pushing fractals into oozing kudzu. The rifle muzzle orbits and descends in a perfect line. Glass is bullet-proof and mirrored. Tatterdemalion and threadbare, igloo-thick clothes pile on the shining skin, hide it. People become too heavy. They go like dogs on the ground.

You grabbed my collar like an animal. We circle slowly, flashing smiles as sharp as razors. We have been making preparations. One of my eyes has gone wolf-hungry and wing-bones are growing out of my shoulders. An old song is playing over the intercom. '*Dream a little dream...*' and the arms circle up to touch for a perfect frozen moment. Then the atom-chain explosion. Walls are fallen. People disappear like focusing a camera lens. We are the epicenter, the shockwave. You ride it with your hair wild like someone touched it. I press my hands against the glass, find the angle at which the world

seems to be beneath me, instead of in front. Maybe
if I push hard enough I will fly into space. There
I could revolve more slowly than a satellite. There
I could see all the stars spark-bright. The song
has changed: ethereal jazz, like the last sound
on a sailor's radio before he is lost to the abyss.
I see your eyes flash as your back slides down the wall.
When I try to leave I feel the chain snap tight around my neck.
There is a fish-hook lodged in my mouth. I watch
as the skin is peeled off. The fluid around trembles.
The tunnel-rats are getting closer. They burn her.
Other people fuck and bleed at odd angles. Mouths
are not meant to be holes. They float up from the bones
of the street and form packs. They hunt each other.
Things fall apart. You tug and I come running.

DIARY OF THE FIRST MISSION

Day 1

Things here don't seem to agree with me. Today
I was out walking alone and I attracted a pack
of wild dogs. They followed me for a while

and their eyes looked almost like all your eyes, back home
on the farthest star from the great maw
at the center of things. And I couldn't help but think
of all of you back at home, lying in the amber light

and feeling each other all around. It's much colder here
but the people insist on staying so far away
except on certain days, or at night

and I wonder how they can stand the dimness on the streets
and the cold grey of their sun.

Day 3

I keep throwing up the food, and my belly
is shrinking in toward my spine. I noticed today
that many of the people eat things that no one seems to like. I wonder
if it makes them strong.

I took a ride in one of those things they use to ride around
and I tried to talk to the man who rode it

and he didn't seem to understand me.

Day 7

I want to try to touch one of them
but the way they go about this is complicated. First
I am supposed to make sure it is alright
by saying something that indicates my desire to become close
without actually asking about it. This is hard.

Then I am supposed to transport them to someplace where we can both ingest something, it doesn't seem to matter what it is, just that you don't finish it. And then I guess they go out on the town. I don't understand because the towns are very large and it's hard to see how to stand on all of it at once.

Day 10

I think that they can tell that I'm not like them. I have managed to get one of them to the cafeteria where I am supposed to initiate the first part of the ritual by ordering something and finding out if I can use my currency to purchase it but let them eat it

but then I said something that was too forward (towards what I don't know, I couldn't see how what I said was moving) and the female (I think it was a female) stormed off but I couldn't see any rain.

Day 19

Maybe I could just try to open one of them up; I don't think they can have very much inside or at least not much in the way of brains.

It looks like they are made of the same stuff they insist on burning and then putting on some other stuff and then cramming down themselves; I do not see how they can be so soft when the things they surround themselves with are all so uncomfortable.

Day 43

I think I will die here. Today I took the thing they call a razor (which is my favorite sound of theirs I have learned)

into the falling-water room and tried
to get through the skin you sent me with
and I could do that

but then I ran into the iron of my skin
and I broke the knife. Please
send help.

Day 96

I have grown fond
of sitting on park-benches
and watching the strange little things
that float, and which they call 'birds.'

Day 455

A dog saw through me. At least
I am not a dog.

Day 674

I can't remember what you look like anymore
at home on the long green beds stretched
all together, while the blue clouds drift
and the red sun floats above you: when I close my eyes
all I can see are these things here, *humans*
walking about to move papers from one place
to another place, or chase a little pointer
around with their eyes. I do not see
why they live like this. But I have forgotten
how to live like we do. I will die here.