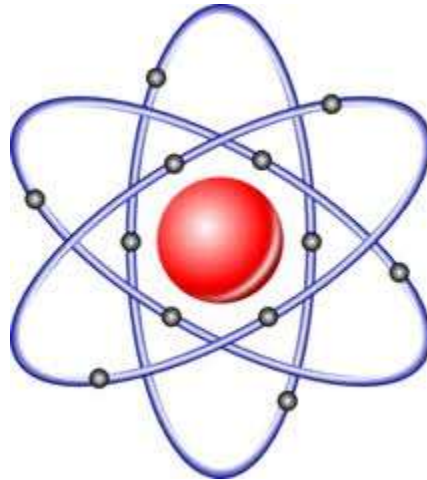


FAMILY: A FICTION



Nathan W. Filbert

He with a scraggly in-turned radiance. Unkempt, rough and sludgy about his edges but signaling redolent pleasure and satisfaction within his within. A look of auto-stimulation, complex and multi-sourced, deep under skin. If this account were meant to be descriptive,

she would be more difficult. Nondescript self-presentation, self-consciously, it takes effort not to notice. Petite and plentiful, with hair like the wind through a forest - but the stories are never about them, except when they tell them. In the minds of their children. They argue about blood, its temperatures according to personalities. And geometry.

Biology the constructing of a poem, or some painted collage coming to be. An interaction she might call "soul."

Young one's suffer depression, signs of ADHD. The faithless among them despising acronyms, particularly the balderdash of GOD.

Not that they've always been artists. Well, perhaps the children – none of them quite old enough to be trained otherwise. None of them sufficiently successful to cease creativity.

"Habits. Roles. Rabbit-holes," they'd sing. And not the magic kind.

No way of knowing how they'd articulate their life/lives, the first step of asking them would depart from the truth, and their diaries aren't at hand, if any are kept.

This isn't that sort of story. Descriptive and historical. Only one of us psychologist in any meaningful sense of the word, if there is one, *psyche* still lacking identified consensus.

Observations will only fool you, reader, seeking what you came for, which is anybody's guess, making it hard to provide - things don't get made that way, only perceived.

Accumulations and exchanges, after a fashion, living being a culture of gifts. Bodies, breath and language. Culture, commerce, identity and style all granted all around, then demanded in variant forms. The made and making, endless change, impossible to evenly trace without a billion points of view.

We enter where we can, chart awhile, take measures and participate, checking out our accuracies with mirrors. Tricky business boiling the dimensions down to two.

Tracking plasma or portals in the brain. It grows obtuse and insanely incomplete, encyclopedically.

Getting at the guts is a fairy tale or myth, and thus belongs to everyone. For the most part they all do well at school, at least are capable, providing the want-to is there, which naturally rises and falls in rhythms like tides, with everybody acting their own moon.

When it's windy.

He's remembering his son, if memory's the term for imagining in absence. Buzz cut hair soft as pillows and smelling of boy – hormone-stripped sweat coupled with grasses and dust. Limitless energy bursting and breaking to snores. Nothing at 50%. Curiosity – tenacious and delightfully illogical, if logic stands for conventional connections, or previously mapped metaphors. Boy leaps these in Supermanner.

She struggles at order, both self-care and implied. Otherwise she lets the current take her until she hits a wall. Then she wishes. Not so much for other things, rather difference. Not what she just did, but something she had a part creating. Lives are sometimes like this. Only in particular times and spaces, though – currents varying all the way through, rivers exhibit a phenomenal variety of pace and flow, swirl and depth, in accordance with recumbent obstacles and passageways, by angles and degrees, among a universe of factors.

But this is not about them, no, it's something more, or less, depending on audience positions and dispositions: is the interest in the subject substance or its shadow? Details or presence?

A hybrid of languages.

"Being does not understand no," a slogan sticking to a corkboard, taken from a favorite writer of his. Increasingly his reading is over again, a part of relation, freshened and new by repetition, uncannily familiar.

or,

"Inspiration could be called inhaling the memory of an act never experienced," perhaps he is inspiring his sons, thought *never* is too harsh.

She chooses the nearest thing to hand and does it. Or picks a to-do that moves her off her ass. It helps if it nourishes, an effort worth cost. The reward.

Unkempt and self-conscious. The inner delights.

Quick to give up, or in, to description. Sidelong glances, or enough periphery, and it's known – they are there. Are here. Which is firstly what needs be established. Shaggy in-turned male and self-consciously-nondescript-as-a-waged-war-within-herself - are here - whether explicitly denoted or not, for that is not what this story's about. And all of their children - as if we're in shadows – near presences felt.

If the man were currently reading (he is reading now), and is sitting at his desk, surrounded by more words, words bound up to burst and licking the chops of their leafy lips, prepared to murmur and shout. It seems to him.

And she would be (read “is”) pushing a broken body into limited stress-inducing motions purposed to loosen and tighten. Laying on a mat on a floor watching women on a screen count and stretch and breathe, mimicking them with her own limbs and torso. Accentuating her “core,” strengthening her “self” for this losing battle.

The children are learning and eating, playing and working - whatever it is youth do to fend for themselves and their futures – their shadow-dance with age.

Unable to say it as is - the *is* too complete and far from attainable - in segments and particles, or a falsified whole from great distance. Oh nature. Oh being. Because of the facts, we have to just enter, and being recursive it matters only slightly where or when – inception/conclusion are unrecognizable to a decentralized everywhere, connective and mobile.

Some are known by their doings, some by their fathers’ or mums’; others according to their works or the times. Some hardly known of at all. To speak of them is to personally encounter - as if face-to-face – an intersubjectivity of optimal expressivity.

Or not. Language gets carried away. When we search for a meaning or some explanation is it not because we already believe it is there? Something already imagined? What remains is a tying together in idealized systems like logic – building a case or crafting a theory, replete with supporting cast of regulatory theorems. Which demonstrates little but our ability to make science out of anything. Exercise in closing the systems. While all remain open.

The rugged male shifts from his papers, given possibilities, which it turns out rhymes everything. She teases her hair nonchalantly (she hopes) and attempts to forget her over-calculations by delving into them – representing them – externalizing image and textures. Viewed askance not head-on, but in outlines and shades or peered at and through, as we’d envision a form from behind. Anything to remove the scrutiny of mere appearance – incorporate more and defraggle illusions of skin.

She scribbles it onto used papers, ready surfaces already marred, turning scarrings and blots into figures and wounds; while he accentuates the peculiar, alarmed by specifics and

seeking connective similitude. If a thought comes queer, he tattoos it with ink until it sounds as if its available.

Both, in a way, finding commerce, a transaction with others engaging/avoiding themselves. Feeling so like and unlike. A pestilence of the species, er, *human condition* – overwhelming similarities of form with infinite intricacies of difference. Everything related – never one without another – a closed system of incalculable possibilities. They labor in.

Male smells sour in just a few days, not accustomed to shouldering public, perhaps what allows for his mess. Adapting to the threat of her attention, though in the absence of comprehension. She allows him his comforts till they confront and offend. Peaceable enough - this arrangement - and duly provocative: they enhance and combine, stimulate and remind one another in a struggling intimacy – they love. Not without precedents or fear, but they love.

And in their sleep, the gears will turn.

He writes off stuck places – the uncanny processes of dreams.

The children behave like loosely arranged magnets, at times slamming close, or sullenly repelled. Usually vibrating, tensely, between. The volatility of past and a future reacts in young bodies as *now*.

Viewed collectively – it's an inter-&-co-dependent mechanism, sketchy and atomically diagrammed - similarly potent (at least potentially) in its splittings and pressures.

Live things best metaphor themselves.

Girl-princess-daughter, her experience as only. Not quite true collectively, there being also steps- and halves- another, older, never cohabitant, but still. The members were stacked. Against or for, another matter. Depending.

The younger, caged one, doesn't eat. Is self-restricting. Flutters like a bird. Her brain engulfs her self, a genetic trait. Possessed also, in some measure, top-down. Each with their own rendition. One definition of family.

Cohabitants. Genetics. Affinities. Their opposite. Relations. Some, after all, being half-habitants, some post-, some occasional-, some rare-. Or endangered. Or in transitions.

If there is a nucleus, it is Scraggly and Self-aware, both co- and in-habitants constantly, at least according to them. In the minds of their children. Whenever they were. Adding an unknowable "if."

The grown and growing exhibit it. The three on their own. Three nearly capable, at least two of which: disinterested. This is not about them, not a descriptive analysis. Maybe more like a song, composing a fugue: each line for itself replete with recurring variations, cringes of dissonance and harmonic highlights. Something like a family, a novel, a history, religion.

Oscillations that swivel near a truth, only to loop and to veer into something more real. Being actual. That is to say, *is happening*.

Inopportune call and subsequent jail time. Jealousies and rivalries, differentials of power. Stirred with a paste of abuse and traces of -isms. Coupled to all the unpredictably brave accomplishments. That sort of thing. The life of a species.

With no one sure how to tell it. Who solos, who's chorus. And when. Where hardly matters in webs. Or does it? Authoritative nights at the table, father propounding to a coven of illumined and down-turned faces – forged not of incantations, but synergies of private networks. Ubiquitous strands of escape. Virtual tunneling. Not to mention insolence. Or simply vanishing within. Daddy lost in thought. Or mum diagnosing (she doesn't like to think it that way). Seldom either/or.

They build a monument, calling it travel. Stripping each other of context, providing a different forum. Humans tend to revert to familiar. Habitude of experience. With no experience, alteration comes to bear. Predictable as weather.

No one's leaving home.

Other words coming to mind.

Resistance.

There is, it seems, in families, this propensity.

Whatever is said, corrected, even when agreed.

Existing to clarify his spouse – to illuminate and exhibit. In turn, she elucidates him. Providing bases or cause – extrapolates. Siblings arguing each other, united they stand, all as deserters. Seven eventual versions of the parental wake-up blare: AWOL.

It's good to be king. Graph the assassination attempts – looks like innards of clocks. A searing clap of surprising betrayal each time. Unlike the spurned and necessarily nutrient *mother*. Shagg proclaiming the law (as devised and developed by nature – read lifegiver/lawgiver “mom” – female coupling nurture and structure within dependency). He handles rebellion, warding attacks and spying the skirmishes, she breeding resentment from ongoing need.

These are general patterns, biologically driven, no symphony the same. With eight keys plus a half, on a twelve-tone scale, the songs recognizable according to differing orders. Typify and characterize. Declare it false.

Scraggydad is nurturing, allowing/confirming resistant responses and recumbent emotions, shame-shirking under her gaze. In other words – as one of them – a remedial complicity. Which she echoes into her drama – the leadership, the guilt, the collapse.

Each wanting to be cradled – rock, paper, scissors style – with an occasional simultaneous Bingo. However unlikely, it's what probability's for.

Thus every level its lingo. Select a word (sex or heaven, death or boy) and provide a taxonomy of related meanings from the eldest parent through littlest child. It comes clear. There are altering thesauri of usage.

Family as a game of Scrabble on the board of Life, each settling Catan. With beeps and whistles and a slew of avatars.

A technique known as mapping provides lay of the land, similar to a geneologist's tree applied to the present. A thing to be explored or verified. Corrected through each journey. In several dictions.

The family edition.

There being always more sides to the stories.

Building blocks of broken bones.

Families at bone-splintering nearness. Whether abusive or conditional; assertive, supportive, overindulgent or neglectful. The pressures in an atom wiggle and hum, each entity squeezed and redirected into another, without foregoing elemental ingredients.

Why drawing so close hurts so much, compounding all the bruising.

Take seven shattered anatomies and circle them into a hug. *Ouch, oof*, shrieks and tears. Sounding like sport or war. Ahem. The game is designed to figure out where it's safe to rest and heal. Together. Every press accentuates wound, but may also set the fracture.

The littered trail. Fragments, chips, and joints. Ankles, ribcage, skulls. The longer held together, dwindles the percentage unharmed. Increases deformation, reformation, and strength in the bindings. History makes the call. Families get made this way.

Alpha male's left-side stress-fractures filigree – he brings them in close to the mama. Pain ensues globally, harder gripping cuts and tears her. Dislodging hip and rib, she wails back, threatening to come undone, wrapping and withholding fragile loins. Glass-cracked between the eyes evincing wince, he lumbers to the bottle – an anesthetic, fog-inducing ICU.

Boys pummel and cling on trampoline. Superheroes blasting at their foes, setting right the world. Divine ninja tricksters, eluding all blows, fending sacred space from viral intrusion. Morphing Jekyll into Hyde. Two-against-one turns to three-on-three, searing yelps and hollered rage compound the fractures and spread the lesions until a fuming heap of shame remains.

Emotion rivers throughout a system. Elaborate table-game of chance, every draw altering rules. And conditions. One discretion cheats them all.

Resistance (fear) and just revenge. Creating hypotheses – infinite dis-ease.

Tuck them in with tender warmth. Dabbing sores with salve. Reconnoitre, reassemble, holding court, calling assembly. The luxury is not repeating childhood, home is not a corridor of labs. Parent positioned now as doctor; infected all the same.

Blood is issue, possible transfusion, tearing tissues. Don't ignore, curing is a share. Having invented them in this inventive world, they must also be wriggled through. Calls for help, from any corner, equate a demand.

The family as quarantine.

To serve and protect.

Seek. Assist.

Quarantine.

Sanctuary.

Sanitarium.

Touch base.

Proceed.

"I propose description as a method of invention and of composition. Description...is phenomenal rather than epiphenomenal, original, with a marked tendency toward effecting isolation and displacement, that is toward objectifying all that's described and making it strange...Description then is apprehension, 'the act or power of perceiving or comprehending' and a motivating anticipatory anxiety, expectant knowledge...the very writing down seems to constitute the act of discovering it...but also and problematically an act of interpreting it."

-Lyn Hejinian-

Hybrids.

What is "normal" or "traditional," what forms remain (for long) in a universe of chaos ever emerging and expending? Convergences, then. Bloodline here, bloodline there, cross it through and pull it taut. Cultural collage.

The parents lead the way, though not as masters, more experiments – of brother linked to sister linked to brother step toward brothers veined by half with sister same as brother. Not personal or by choice until fixed in the same installation. Could be called art, called family.

Other halves and steps by three with partners of their own yet bleeding half their blood. Where are they? A sitcom cast of lesbians and addicts, the wealthy and the poor, the liberal, constrained. Kaleidoscoping styles and beliefs - "it takes a village" - and they've settled one.

Working well enough – a jalopy needing constant tinkers. It most assuredly breaks down. Imagine society. Or the size of it, extended. How many grandparents can a child acquire? Its fine for rituals like births and holidays – multiplying spoils – but where does one belong? With whom? Family-by-affinity? Reunions become a game of pick-up-sticks or jacks and marbles (except with persons). Arbitrary circles depending on usable space.

The family tree she drew for therapy's a forest. Cottonwoods and pines, baobab, bonsai. An oak thrown in for measure, and barely identified shrubs. What base is there to touch?

Parliament versus monarchy, troubling the court of appeals. With manager-types and generals, gurus, debaters and clowns. Stir in deconstruction and some faith for emotive stew. It's a kinky chain of command, yet all are bound by it. Children vying a vote.

And if infected by the peacemaker-pleaser-gene, the torsion becomes a complicated interpretive dance. A surplus of baggage with all the due fees. A lot to saddle on young.

They're resilient. Navigating democracy and other octagonal squares -awkward parallelograms - never quite losing site of Atlantis. Lost kingdom, utopian, buried deep under vast emotional sea, at times nearly glimpsing a spire. At least some strange stirring. Dreams of a large enough house. Solving nonsymmetrical fusion equations. These children are smart.

If an artist paints the picture she performs mixed-media collage with inks and clay and dozens of paints, incorporates cloth and wire and found objects with hopes enough resin or wax

will contain it. Hold it all fast. And still let everything – everyone – be seen. The composer creates an erratic symphony – arrhythmic with regular dissonance, whelming moments dramatic with harmony and occasional measures of quiet resolutions. The scientist keeps figuring on emergent chaos, open-ended systems like weather and complexly variable algorithms. Author writes it down and edits, erases as much as inscribes, constantly losing track.

Each makes their own scribbled lines, overlaid. Its sketchy and messy and thick. Kids jumping ropes, fingering string figures, string theory, Spiderman-webs. It gets made.

“...like a kaleidoscope which is every now and then given a turn, society arranges successively in different orders elements which one would have supposed to be immovable, and composes a fresh pattern.”

-Marcel Proust, Within a Budding Grove-

Boy meets girl. Man, Woman. Husband, Wife. Father, Mother. Produces the child, a child, children.

Pieces shake out of joint.

Father. Husband. Man. Girl. Woman. Boy. Produces the child, a child, children.

Arranges different order.

Husband meets girl. Man, Woman. Husband, Wife. Mother, Father. Mother. Produces the child, a child, children.

Jumble and collide, slide over.

Girl meets boy. Man. Husband. Father. Woman. Husband. Wife. Mother. Mother. Child, child, children. Produces none. Adds three.

Kaleidoscopes fresh patterns.

Husband, Wife. Men. Women. Father. Father. Mother. Mother. Mother. Child. Child. Child. Child. Child. Child. Child. (Children).

Many is the new unit. Same – the new variety. Names – the faulty designators.

Fall the doctrines of origin and cause. The sense *belong*. The myths of ontology. Infinite regress. Unlimited semiotics.

Turn the scope, altering view – collage is the new entire. Copy – the new original. Fragment – the new whole.

Child. Child. Child. and Child. Child. Child. Child. “belonging” now to Father-Mother. Father. Mother-Mother. Mother-Father.

Fresh pattern.

By steps and halves and partnerships; alliances and circumstance and blood.

Arithmetic of variables multiplied by chance and power.

Now $Mo^3 + M^3 = 2 + 2 + 3^{-5}$ or $F^3 + W^3 = 2(-1/2) + 2(-1/2) + 3^{-1}$ where Mo=mother (Mo^1, Mo^2, Mo^3, Mo^4), M = man (F=father, W=wife, H=husband, and so forth⁻¹ once removed).

The scraggly male through one variable and nonsymmetrical equation would be $F^{2 \times 2 (+3/.5)} H^3 M^?$ for $W^3/C^2 + C^2 + 1/2C^3$ or Father of C=biological children 4 times via 2 sets with 3 additional ½-

children by marriage to W^3 (third wife) which man or woman they are for one another is an n = unknown variable.

A physicist might be able to map this new arrangement, fresh patterning of conventionality: the family by strands of blood and webbed relations multiplying, bending and stretching (read: *re-signifying*) concept terms and nouns of relation such as *brother*, *sister*, *mother*, *father*, *spouse* &/or *partner*.

All in variable contexts. Involves *Theory of Complexity*. Without mastery or solutions. No absolutes. Arbitrary forms actively adapting. No truths. A world of half-breeds and bastards. Infinite regress. Anomaly.



“we live in accumulations of the actual / with so little understanding”

-Verlyn Klinkenborg-

I believe that it is possible to make stories out of anything, with words. Even wordless ones.

Stories on the move, within movement, perhaps even moving.

Accumulation and erosion, not addition and subtraction, multiples or divides – not mathematics, simply or complex.

In relations - part of related systems of relations, related further on, in, out - there are no statics, numbers, letters – even hypothetically. When you fix one you’ve simply entered another system of relations relating to other fixed (or agreed-upon) relations, lifeless but for you. Until employed. Then your letter, number, static sign or symbol dissolves right back into what it came from – the roiling motion of temporal patterns and relations – change processing itself.

The meanings meander through like liquids. Each part spilling its own glass. Watch it flow, divert, tumble and pool. Percolate. Evaporate. Stories.

Describing them, no matter how many points of view or entry, how many semiotic systems employed, internal or external – observation is evaluation, almost objectively subjective – merely means a story, embodying an absorbing and evaporative spilling of change. Eddies a bit, branches and drips, absorbs here and there, ever morphing form and content.

I can only ever tell you – in this system of systems of relations, this *language* – what I do not know.

The fathers, the mothers, their partners and pasts, the living of nine children to this moment – refuse to be snap-shotted still, photographed, defined. They are unknowns, rife with variables, and related. Related to relations and related systems of relations related further out, in, on...

Genuinely incomprehensible. Evaporating almost as soon as precipitate, incalculable with options and openness – far more than this system can relate.

The fathers love their wives and their women, their sons and their daughters, and sometimes it’s even perceived that way. The women, mothers, partners, also love – and everyone’s love is conditioned and conditional. Givers, receivers, assertive, supportive, neglectful, abusive, indulgent, and free at a price. Relational acts in related systems of relations – addressors and addressees, perceived and perceiving, at once.

Each its own glass spilling. Each its own refilled. The sharing of endless waters.

Shagg dribbles fluid ice-cold onto a young one’s burn. Rather than soothe it stings. Recoils. Mother in attempting to quench a thirst, drowns it instead. A child spills that all might see, might hear, might feel. Instead it’s absorbed deftly and quickly – instinctively – by inanimate terry cloth, a dish-towel, a bathrobe.

A possibility of endless supply, of infinite, is foreign to all but dreams. We know nothing unpolluted or immeasurable. We must not write what we know. Nothing there but an emptying glass.

Instead, perhaps, to offer and receive – these fluids, this language – of unknown origin and imperceivable limit – spilling together compounding toward stories. Even as it spills. Even uncontrollable and ill-perceived.

Families of stories. Write what you do not know.

“There was something tragic in fighting the borders, the heroism of shortcomings, the panic of passion.”

-Bruno Schulz/Jonathan Safran Foer-

Remembering first site: where met, what seen, who did, said and how.

We can go there, recreationally, anew.

Tangly garden, the smell of food, moisty air and a she and a him wandering through florid trellises on barely trails. Something begins.

An arrival, a vision, a breath.

They eat and speak, jostling giggles, tangling knees. They are happy with anticipation to realize.

Eye-movements and alcohol, presenting. Blending to flavor their mouths for the meeting. And further still, past introduction – names and facts and telephones – for months of hours.

Even sleeping through nights, receivers awake in their slumber. But face-to-face invented an optimal – expression exceeding – verbal/aural toward visually kinetic.

Hand to dancing leg, uplifted and exposed, a slight flirtation interlocking and embrace. The sky was leaking bliss and they without umbrellas, faces opened and upraised to be forward.

The rented room, hesitant jumble. Limbs like ganglia on music, flailing and pulsing and alternating rhythms. On such a scale. Spiraling themes, and everything improvised.

Which became the uncanny and announcements to friends. “That’s a lot of baggage,” they replied to excitement, calculating spouses, careers, digitizing the children and distant thousands of miles. Let alone all the dangling remainders.

And yet they persist. Airfare and phonelines, sitters and several states. Unable to locate square roots, figuring unresolvable answers to nonlinear equations.

Seemingly insoluble. They worked at the problems, nearly convinced of their theories. Hypotheses and tangents matched excuses unrestrained. A mountain hollow downpoured with rain. Something fell, an infidelity to measures. And again, wrapped in a mail bomb of message. Risk was reported. Purporting fear.

The letters flew over the lines, bodies mired in their pasts. Something was bound up to break.
And fracturing, she did.