

Sticky Sublime

2000

We dream of traveling through the world. But isn't the world within us? We little know the depths of our own mind. The mysterious road goes inwards.

Novalis

What is a breath, and what must a weaving be, so as to come into being again as a breath?"

Harold Bloom

Seesaws go up and down, sliding boards go down. You hang on monkey bars every which way. Swings fly you over the heads of grown-ups. The air rushes up your

skirt, in your panties, through your hair, and around your fingertips. The horizon moves, and things that you are used to, seem different. But soon it gets weird. John John must have felt it on that sad summer night when he plunged his Piper into the sea. He was cute. He was lost. The horizon dissolved like molasses in hot black coffee.

His daddy knew exactly where he was going when he died, all those people watching, that sunny afternoon. He never knew what hit him. And they'll never know who did it. That's what's really weird.

You can still get lost in it.

But when you fly on a swing, your legs, your arms, your head, are all pushing you up, and over that bar. You can't stop; you don't want to, until you drop from the sky and...splat.

Well, not really--that's the fun.

Anyway, I'm too old for it now. I don't think about it anymore. I just let it happen.

I mean, the way that you see slips into the way that you feel?

A trio of quiet people walks the city these days, two men, one tall, the other short, both with prominent noses. The third is a petite female. I would be fascinated to know if they keep thongs in their drawers, because their outward appearance is perfectly Victorian. Mostly black, their costumes are correct to the finest detail, including a monocle plugged in the shorter man's eye. Once I saw them on Houston Street standing in line at the Angelica Theater. It seemed incongruous that they were going to a movie at all. Would they fear the arrival of a cinematic train? Were they going to see *All About My Mother*? On another occasion I saw them pushing a fold-up shopping cart filled with

vegetables and cleaning aids. The broccoli looked eternal, so did the onions, but the style of the shopping cart was all wrong. So was the Brillo. Shouldn't they be using scrub brushes?

These contemporary Victorians, correct down to the hand embroidered curlicue on the woman's black bodice, and a particularly excruciating starched collar around the younger man's neck, carry all the accoutrements of the Victorian era. Stylistically, they embody Victorian ethics, morals, the whole of *nineteenth-century* humanism. Or they would if they weren't going to a movie at the Angelica. But what alternatives does a Victorian have on a Saturday night in Manhattan?

In "Two or Three Ideas," Wallace Stevens, a consummate stylist, explained his approach to poetry. His first idea is "The style of the poem and the poem itself are one." This sets off a train of logic: Most poets with something to say are content to say it, and most poets who have nothing to say are more concerned with *the way* that they say it. It follows that "in considering style and its own creations, that is to say, the relation between style and the unfamiliar, it may be, or become, that the poets who have little or nothing to say are, or will be, the poets that matter."

Steven's second idea is "The style of the gods and the gods themselves are one." This is easy enough to conclude since, for the most part, we know gods through writings and art. Especially when they die, like the Greek gods have, all that's left are stories and statues. He concludes: "In an age of disbelief, or, what is the same thing, in a time that is largely humanistic, in one sense or the other, it is for the poet to supply the satisfactions of belief, in his measure and in his style."

Flip to New York circa 1990, before the homeless got thrown off the streets; when you still saw shabbily dressed people talking to themselves. You thought it was pent-up anger, or maybe they were crazy. If they held a hand to their ear, one assumed an earache, perhaps worse.

Today, people with this demeanor are very well dressed. Just yesterday a girl unbasketed her persimmons onto the counter of Dean & DeLuca as she argued about what time she should come home. The cause of her distress, her mother, was invisible; so was the phone, because even her mike-clip was hidden by cascading auburn hair. This negotiation resulted in a hang-up--not as visually dramatic as it used to be--and immediate reconnection, with amorous apologies to her boyfriend.

Another time I saw a 30ish yuppie roller-blade into Starbucks screaming at his broker. As he paid for his coffee, he actually fired the guy on the spot. What spot? Except for his raised voice, erratic arm movements, all of which we normally assume are directed at a person, there was no *sign* of another--only the empty space between his eyes and the blackboard menu he perused on the wall. This is all very existential: he directs his anger at once to no one and to everyone. On the other end of the line, we have to assume *someone* was feeling good, bad, or indifferent--someone human.

Any notice of nature or culture, of mountain, lake, ravine, or Lexus, filters, of course, through human eyes and human discourse. Whether by cell-phone, book, or simple conversation, there's always something mediating the relationship between one and another. That's why it's rough to get out of the deconstructivist bind, why post-modernism turned back into itself, and why there has been so much art about art.

Assuming we know the difference between a human and a phone tree, one possible direction would be to start with the anger or love you cannot express successfully to the latter.

The sublime depends on what it means to be human, because it is the response of a human--physically, emotionally, and intellectually--to the expansiveness of literature, art, or nature, that makes possible the "*hypsous*," or "state of transport," that is the spark of sublimity.

When Stevens said humanism replaced religion in a "time of disbelief," he was defining "creations of modern art and modern literature."

But in postmodern times, humanism itself is a point of contention.

Nietzsche expressed his deep skepticism of humanity even before the dawn of the twentieth century, and was very pessimistic about the century yet to come. Of course, the nineteenth-century industrial revolution was complicit with the rise and fall of romanticism and ultimately blossomed into the Great War in Europe, a war that Nietzsche did not live to see. Talk about a calamity of style--horses charging headlong into tanks.

The atomic bomb, a definite stylistic shift, ended the Second World War, and its mere idea propagated deep suspicion of progress. This suspicion contributed to the advent of post-modern criticism, which became so popular in the late seventies and early eighties. Post-modernism critiqued the notion of both technological and stylistic advance, and succeeded with the ironic assumption that *it* was the forefront of theory.

But so much has changed, since even the Reagan presidency, when Edward W. Said expressed *his* contradictory feelings of affection and revulsion for the "humanist", when Foucault declared humanism dead (as least the modernist notion of it) and when Lyotard compiled a series of lectures called *The Inhuman* that included "Can Thought go on without a Body?"

Not coincidentally, it was exactly at this time that we learned to fear bodily fluids. This added irony to insult, given the fact that we are 98.5% liquid. Not only our humanity, but our most basic and biological selves were suspect.

Happily, progress has been made on some biological fronts. For one, they have mapped the human genome. Knowing one's particular genetic makeup, one's strengths and weakness, has extensive potential for preventative medicine and for extending one's life span in ways unheard of before. Of course, it will also be the cause of much worry because people will take their genetic strengths for granted and obsess about the weaknesses that will ultimately kill them.

We may be at a place analogous to an earlier reassessment of the human: the writing of *Moby Dick*. The novel followed the publication of Darwin's *Origin of the Species*. At that time, while settling comfortably into the Victorian era, the Western world learned that whales are mammals and much closer to humans than previously assumed. This evolutionary elevation of what had hitherto been thought of as a fish and sometime

monster, made a white whale especially frightening. Being white, an abnormality, made him strange, but also strangely like the people reading *Moby Dick*. The recent discovery that humans are genetically close to fruit flies, as well as some sort of worm--genetically identical in gene count but different with respect to various strengths and susceptibilities--will probably have some aesthetic impact. It may also define new concepts of race based on subtle, yet unheard of differences.

In his recent book, Harold Bloom argues that Shakespeare invented the human. For Bloom, Shakespeare expressed what is *essential* human nature, not passing social phenomenon. But whether we attribute humanism to Shakespeare, Cicero, Sappho, Euripides, Woopie Goldberg, DNA, or *Cats*, any contemporary notion of the sublime will inevitably be linked to what *the human* signifies.

A child is born. They cut the cord and hand him to *The Head Shaper* who moulds his head from a cone-shaped mass to something more acceptable, something round. He opens his mouth. Does he think the breast part of himself, as the womb arguable was? At what point on the umbilical cord does he stop, and she begin? This ambiguity may have something to do with a woman's sense of autonomy as well as anatomy. She quite literally has the possibility to experience a new self within the physicality of her own. Of course, at this point, the child hasn't yet acquired the word *breast*. The sublime is not simply sublimity. It is the loss of a self, which first must be acquired--through study, connoisseurship, through one's varied relations to other people--through the impulses, memories, principles and energies that evolve into a sense of self.

It is possible that in acknowledging varieties of culture, (so homogenized through global commodification, communication, and the pretensions of all-encompassing ideologies) we have neglected the possibility of a multifarious self. Sublime obliteration defies category—be it genus, gender, ethnicity, author, reader, reviewer—not necessarily when you critique it as Kant did, but when you write it as Whitman or O'Hara did, or when you experience it as anyone can. Frank O'Hara embodied the victorious liberation that *was* the sublime. He transgressed even human identity and found within his I, a light mist *and* a baboon:

I am a Hittite in love with a horse. I don't know what blood's
in me I feel like an African prince I am a girl walking downstairs
in a red pleated dress with heels I am a champion taking a fall
I am a jockey with a sprained ass-hole I am the light mist
in which a face appears...

To acknowledge the sublime, is to admit that there is something, God or nature, that defines and transcends human culture and what it means to be human. If some definition of the sublime endures, it will depend on whether humans write future dictionaries. It will also rely on a sense of the human self in all its variety, however transformed, and at least a begrudging acknowledgement that there are more things in heaven and earth, than are dreamt of in our philosophy.

What size you are, 6, 12, 14, has a lot to do with the landscape--especially in the French Alps, way up on a mountain where the air is thin, jumping off a cliff with a crescent-shaped wing like a parachute. But you don't have to go down the way parachutes do. You can fly back up to whatever perches you want.

First you spread the cloth out like a picnic. Then when the wind comes round, you run, jump, and lift into the sky. I am not an orthodontist; I don't know what kind of birds they are up there--huge, brown with white tails and wingtips--and the white peak of nothing less than Mt. Blanc staring you in the face. First I was scared shitless, so was my boyfriend. After the first day he stayed in the hotel reading Proust. A blonde instructor took me up the first week. I hung in front of him, his legs wrapped tight around me. But soon you relax. You begin to trust people, even if you're not French--especially those who tied the ropes to the chute. I think it was made in Taiwan, so you have to trust the Chinese

too. You lay them out right, and hope the knots will hold, that the lines are strong, and that the whole thing--whoever thought it up--will fly. They didn't believe in this sort of thing in 1896, after all those crack-ups. It took time, and Leonardo De Vinci, the Wright Brothers, a V2 rocket, Sputnik, monkeys, a couple of dead astronauts, and some very light cloth to get it right.

My chute was white, but there were some orange and blue ones up there too. At four thousand meters or so, that's a lot of feet, you forget you're afraid; you are as free as one of those brown and white birds. The only difference is, you know it, because you're on vacation.

On a desolate strip of beach near Collioure, where Matisse invented Fauvism and close to where Walter Benjamin committed suicide, stands a little shack called the Chirringuito. Desolation is difficult to come by anywhere on the Mediterranean. But there, no matter where you look it's dramatic--the Pyrenes behind, and the waves sliding in on the beach just twenty yards in front. The restaurant itself is a kind of device for the sublime, providing food and wine for its surroundings.

The last time I ate there, just after the rain, a fat rainbow appeared, and the clouds over the horizon lifted, pulling along the beard of a scraggily old man. Then the evening sun cut through the vault of clouds. Seagulls, confused or inspired by the phenomena, flew not as a flock, but as individuals. The sun, close to the horizon, illuminated their white wings as they darted, somersaulted, and then disappeared.

This particular evening I met several friends, including Jacques Henric, novelist, and editor of *Art Press*. Like most card-carrying French communists, he always smokes a cigar.

He said that he might write about the anti-sublime because he was not a romantic. I said, Jacques, "How can you be sitting here, with what's going on with the sky, if you're not a romantic?"

The Moroccan lights swayed wild orange. I had drunk at least a bottle of Chateau de Jau, and Jacques' ember dropped to the sand.

"What about Yves Klein," I asked, "The Conquistador of the Void? And that leap into space? How did he do that--and all those scorching blowtorches?"

"What is 'scorching?'" Jacques asked. I was speaking English.

"And what about that blue? I slurred. "If you're not romantic there's always Barbara Kruger. Talk about terror sublime. She tries to frighten you with culture, not nature...all those scarlet letters. It's her version of culture, not stormy skies that's scary, trying to make you feel small in a room."

All along, I knew that Henry Miller would have liked this restaurant. And he wrote, TO BE SUCCESSFUL YOU HAVE TO CONQUER THE ROMANTIC IN YOURSELF

In painting, you have to go back to Newman, Still, and Rothko for serious sublime. With abstract expressionism, and the lives of several of its practitioners, it's the romance of the tragic hero. It took a new generation of artists to KO that sublime. Rauschenberg demystified DeKooning through a brilliant erasure, itself an act of blankness. And his identical drip paintings, *Factum I* and *II*, attacked the uniqueness of the individual brushstroke as did Lichtenstein's mechanically silk-screened cartoon drips.

Postmodernism was even less kind to the sublime, certainly not kind to a Romantic sort of anything. Intent on improving the world morally, it took itself seriously in a different way than Rothko and Newman did.

But now, you can have your cake and eat it too. Despite cell phones, PhotoShop, aluminum scooters, gene profiling, and cube computers, maybe some progress *has* been made. Before the Christmas tree arrives in November, you can find a bit of contemporary sublime in a puppy at Rockefeller Center. Sadly, by the time this is published, we will have to speak of Jeff's dog in the past tense, at least in its present location. Coming off

the sidewalk from Fifth Avenue, you can see why Kant designated flowers as beautiful, though he might have meant pretty. From a distance it's cute and blooming, but when you get up close, it towers over you. My son wanted to climb. You can't blame him. From one angle it has the same silhouette as the Matterhorn. Philosophers have, on occasion, designated *that* as sublime. But the corporate mugglafity of Rockefeller Center looms overhead and the play of nature and culture ricochets like a pinball. This sort of sublime won't take *itself* seriously. As soon as you get near to it, it yelps.

Oh...hi..

No, It's Ok...

Around Fourteenth Street, near the Green Market...

Last night. Yeah.. It was alright...

Actually, it wasn't at the museum...

No...It was up on sixtieth street, yeah ...someone's home...no, the west side.

Hillary was in town, there was a lot of traffic. It took a half an hour to go two blocks, and then we couldn't....

That tall black thing at the bottom of the park...Up on the fiftieth floor or something. They opened the entire apartment....all windows...every exposure, and very clean.

I'm sorry, it wouldn't have worked...You know that....

One of the directors...

What... sorry. I can't hear.. Actually, I'm on an escalator. What?...We hardly knew anyone--a couple people, Alice. yeah, you know...and Chuck.

On the walls...mostly photographs. This dead girl, with a face... staring...blank. I don't think it was Cindy. I think it was someone making a comment on Cindy...dead...expressionless.

Look, could we discuss this... Well, if I had that kind of money I would have had a couple of Courbets around. No, I'm not a conservative. You're the one who voted for...Yes, the place was incredible, all windows, like there was no there there.... I said to William, what do you do if you want to walk around naked?...Look, I'm allowed to walk around naked in front of him. He is my husband. No I wasn't walking around naked there...It was the Museum of Modern Art...well not technically, but, I mean, all those directors and curators...anyway, its just a hypothesis. What? I can't hear you...OK...better? It was this kind of glass you can see out, but they can't see in. Anyway, there was this huge photo, this girl with a snipped-off nose. I kind of liked it. It occupied one whole wall like that big red painting...No, it was a photograph. William didn't get it. He took one look and said "PhotoShop." He just thought it was a weird snipped-off nose. I saw it immediately. It was a kiss, but they had smudged out the face of the guy and made it like the texture of the wall, like the wall became him or something. So it looked like she was kissing empty space, and the snipped-off part was where his nose had originally covered hers, but now he was the brick wall and it was hanging on a white wall and...I know, I'd like to be kissing you too...What?...Yes, you...Look, all I did was go to a party with my husband...It's not like...I think I don't want to talk about art anymore...

It was like heaven. The sun had just set. I know I could have got a good night's sleep there. But I have to tell you...On the coffee table there was this piece of Plexiglas, like a brick or something. Can you hear me? Yes a Plexiglas brick, and squished in this brick was a piece of blue paper. It looked personal. Well, it was a check, a personal check...for, would you believe...five...million...dollars. That's a lot of cash, even these days. No, it wasn't someone's piece. It was stamped on the back by a bank. It was made out to the IRS -- It was last...year's...taxes. I don't know if they were Republicans. Actually on the other side of the coffee table there was a row of eight or nine paintings... They were about nine by twelve inches each...Why do you have to interpret everything

sexually?...They were paintings. Each had a little bulge... I can't explain it, each one was a single color; they weren't flat, they bulged out, they... Its like they were pregnant...

What?...

No, darling. I'm not pregnant.

The paintings. It looked like..

Stop freaking out...You don't have anything to worry...

Look, I'm in Toys-Are-Us.

The paintings...

Anyway I had to go to the bathroom. There was this girl looking at a sculpture...Yes, she was looking at a sculpture in the bathroom. People have sculptures in bathrooms... So I asked her if she could leave for a moment. She looked at me like I was crazy, as if-- everything was so perfect--I was actually going to flush that thing?

Anyway, when I came out, William went in. He always has to pee. So I walked into one of the bedrooms. Imagine this corner, this window around the bed like a ravine. There's glass there between you and the sidewalk. Anyway, there was this long photograph on one wall...I don't know...very long...you want numbers...OK, fifteen feet. It was a photo of a desert, I think with some mountains in the background. Right in the middle of the sky, wearing this white billowy dress, like Gustave Klimpt, was this woman floating in the sky. I knew if William came in he would have said "PhotoShop," and that would have ruined it, but he was still in the bathroom looking at the sculpture. There was some important curator on one side of the room...I don't know, he just looked like a curator...and he was paging through a huge book--surrounded by people, all looking at the book with him. And so I had this photo, this long photo on the wall, all to myself. And then I turned around and I looked out that big plate glass window, and the photo with the girl floating in the sky behind me reflected in the window in front of me and it was getting dark and I was facing east...yes...the East River... a full moon....Orange....Well, it might have been white in Brooklyn, but in Manhattan it was definitely orange, and, and it was floating...right there in her tummy, in the belly of her reflection. And I could see it

floating, and at the same time I could see myself reflected in the reflection of the girl in the photo floating in the sky above the east river with the moon floating in her belly, and I was this reflection...and there I was...I don't know...

OK...yes...maybe...

Yes...sometime... Ok. maybe sometime this weekend.

So what's the difference between living gods and dead gods if we know both through stories and statues? It must be something like empathy. Though unmistakably human, we find empathy in other species, in a mother's care for her offspring, for example. We can find it in gods as well. How wonderfully confusing, regardless of death, that we find it still, through their stories and statues.

For modernism, style was the deity.

It turned ragamuffin for postmodernism. In *Writing Degree Zero* (1953) Roland Barthes questioned the use of language above the base level of signification: "Whatever its sophistication," Barthes wrote "style has something crude about it: it is a form with no clear destination, the product of a thrust, not an intention, and, as it were, a lonely dimension of thought." Style was "never anything but metaphor, that is, the equivalence of the author's literary intention and 'carnal structure.'" Authors may therefore be imagined who "prefer the security of art to the loneliness of style."

Though Barthes wrote from a literary standpoint, his book formed a basis for emerging conceptualists--to shuck their art of style. I believe that some of us knew, however, that it was an impossible undertaking. Now it is quite easy to recognize conceptual documentation--photos and texts stuck on a board--through the parity of its style. And through a bit of contemporary irony, conceptualism's appearance seems to be

co-opted by Armani Exchange, so that it is easier than ever to feel nostalgia for that mid-sixties rawness.

But to eliminate metaphor is to exclude iconic possibilities. Like photographs and many drawings, metaphor is a substitution though similarity. Conversely, the relationship of the sound of a word to what it means is random, based on substitution through convention. These marks are not pipes, turtles, or chairs, nor do they look like them. They are orderly squiggles that, through the narrative of our humanity, transcend their inkyness and become, for example, a mermaid. It's a small step from this rudimentary transcendence to connotation, and to metaphor and metonym. From these and repetition, flows style.

As conspiracy theories abounded in the sixties, there were attempts to get to the bottom of what style does to art. Antonioni's *Blowup*, 1966, approached zero degree from the viewpoint of a young photographer who happens to witness a murder late at night in a park. The murderer (like that shadowy figure on the grassy knoll (1963) is obscured in the bushes. The photographer enlarges his photographs over and over again to find out who did it. But as the image grows in size, so do the grains of the photograph. He is left, not with a perpetrator, but with the medium in which he began--the image of grain.

Transcendence is the key to the sublime. Thomas McEvelley reminds us that discourse about the sublime began with Longinus. That treatise has survived two millennia: "All other attributes prove their possessors to be men, but sublimity carries one up to the majestic mind of God."

Contemporary surrogates—painting, poetry, a television or computer just clicked off or left on—so often have blank expressions. It is this blankness that embodies, if blankness can embody, an old aspect of the contemporary sublime--empty spirit in vacant space.

The question then is one of liberty--where to jump off before you get to God.

Among the hours of his life to which the writer looks back with peculiar gratitude, as having been marked by more than ordinary fullness of joy or clearness of teaching, is one passed, now some years ago, near time of sunset, among the broken masses of pine forest which skirt the course of the Ain, above the village of Champagnole, in the Jura. It is a spot which has all the solemnity, with none of the savageness, of the Alps.

It was Springtime, too; and flowers were coming forth in clusters crowded for very love; there was room enough for all, but they crushed their leaves into all manner of strange shapes only to be nearer each other. There was the wood anemone, star after star, closing every now and then into nebulae: and there was the oxalis, troop by troop, like virginal processions of the Mois de Marie, the dark vertical clefts in the limestone choked up with them as with heavy snow, and touched with ivy on the edges--ivy as light and lovely as the vine; and ever and anon, a blue gush of violets, and cowslip bells in sunny places; and in the more open ground, the vetch, and comfrey, and the wild strawberry, just a blossom or two, all showered amidst the golden softness of deep, warm, amber-colored moss.

We came out presently on the edge of the ravine; there was a hawk sailing slowly, touching the trees nearly with his wings, and with the shadows of the pines flickering upon his plumage from above; but with a fall of a hundred fathoms under his breast, and the curling pools of the green river gliding and glittering dizzily beneath him.

It would be difficult to conceive a scene less dependent upon any other interest than that of its own secluded and serious beauty; but the writer well remembers the sudden blankness and chill which were cast upon it when he endeavored, in order more strictly to arrive at the sources of its impressiveness, to imagine it, for a moment, a scene in some aboriginal forest of the New Continent. The flowers in an instant lost their light, the river its music; the hills became oppressively desolate; a heaviness in the boughs of the darkened forest showed how much of their former power had been dependent upon a life which was not theirs, how much of the glory of the imperishable, or continually

renewed, creation is reflected from things more precious in their memories than it, in its renewing.

We climbed from the edge of the ravine to a foundry ruin where slaves had smelt iron for cannons. Along the path you might dislodge a blue stone or two. Anthracite changes color when heated, and the ovens scattered sapphires as the by-product of artillery. Through famine and good, rain carried the stones to the sea.

We traversed a stream and found a chapel tucked in a grove of twisted dogwood. During the war monks piled sandbags against the interior walls to protect its frescoes from shells. Late in June a shell did fall through the roof. Though it didn't explode, it punctured a body-size hole in the ceiling. Depending on the time of day and the angle of the sun, this hole illuminated the heads of Christ and the apostles painted on the walls. Sunlight danced on the vibrant chromiums, the viridian, and the ultramarine. The frescos were seen as they never had been before. Haloes glowed miraculously. But the hole also let in rain. So workers restored the roof, and the frescos grew dark again.

The pews were carved from sudden oak. Granite pillars support the crusty ceiling. There was no cross or statue of the Virgin.

The smell of damp peat permeated the room, wafting from a musty fire just outside the crypt. On the top of the altar lay an offering of various loaves. Or maybe they were sponges. I counted thirty-five of moderate size, and one of great dimension. I was uncertain if they were loaves or sponges, because they were all painted blue, a very brilliant blue. A delicately inscribed card, folded like a place setting, stood to one side. It read simply, "wet paint." But they didn't look wet. They were covered in dust.

You eat bread when you are hungry. You bathe with a sponge. Though the line is oft times blurred, hunger is a fact of nature, and cleanliness a necessity at eventide.

"I don't know if I can do this," she said, "I am having my period,"

"Period?" I asked. "I know a period when I see one. A period is not chromium, viridian, or even ultramarine, like these loaves of bread, these sponges, or whatever they are."

"Yes," she said, "a period is scarlet like wine, and I could use some right now. These sponges are very nice."

She was more sure than I that the original habitat of the objects was aquatic.

"Anyway," she continued, "if we are going to do it, I have to take this out. If I don't, where will it go? Think of it--stuffed! Can I lean on these things?"

"I wouldn't," I said, "if I were you. You might smush them, and then, where will we be?"

She extracted the swollen cloth as we kneeled beside the altar. I wrapped my arms around her tummy.

Obstructed by an array of islands, and heated by the sun, a stream festers in the Caribbean causing the surface of the sea to rise considerably. This congestion is relieved by what is probably the most voluminous current in the world, the Gulf Stream, which runs along the coast of North America, separated from it by a narrow strip of cold water known as the "cold wall," to a point off the south-east of Newfoundland. At this point the Gulf Stream water mixes with that of the Labrador current, and a drift current eastwards is set up under the influence of the prevailing westerly winds: this is generally called the Gulf Stream Drift. When the gulf stream drift approaches the eastern side of the Atlantic it splits into two parts, one going southward along the north-west coast of Africa, the Canaries current, and the other turning northwards passing to the west of the British isles.

So in Ireland, pineapples grow, mimosas fold their fronds at night, and daffodils appear early in spring.

She arched her back. Except for a chiffon kerchief, she was naked; our heads were even with the furious blue that stretched before us--a dusky, delectable, debatable land.

Let me describe the frescoes.

Bill Beckley, December 8, 2000