

ENIGMA OF THE PIANO

a long poem by John Devlin

Part 1: The Art of Black and White

In Troy I died: I will rise again to breathe a fresher bloom of breath
on these ancient streets; in this Asian spring I will exhale a fresher bloom
of breath so that these bones of warriors shall live. Rising: joint
of bone and tissue joining bone and bone, a whole army resting on these shores
of Asia Minor where the anemone and almond trees bloom, recalling Granta Water
or Grand Pré, when Margaret's brother died in the Great War. To be seen
again in a renewed past, no laws of physic broken, no bones broken
or tissue severed but to exult in being alive again: to walk on this hallowed ground
around a magic ring of holly bushes, here in Nova Scotia, almost an island

but jutting out into a cold North Atlantic, sometimes wafted by the zephyrs of
the Gulf Stream. Flowers expand under such a sky, caressed by a balmy, moist
flow in off the water, and the poppy and rose shall be one. Under mild western
skies, under mild western eyes that see the Garden where the Rose and the Hart
will be one. The music coming in off the calm, flat waters does not jangle my
nerves, but offers a soothing balm to a soul lost in a forest searching and
searching so many long years, and not even knowing what it was to be found.
Not to find but to be found: when expression was eventually vouchsafed in
the harsh spruce woods. The lotus floats counter to the climatic flow to
rude Nova Scotian shores. John, my brother, died in the War, buried in Italy
Now do not say I am sad or grieving, for I know that my Redeemer liveth
Now do not say I am deceived in my longings, for I am glad to be here
This place my brother, John, died to save. So let the winter blasts blow.

And I was pounding at the gates of paradise for a long time, and I became weary for the gates would not open, and I had not the key. So I lay down for the space of an hour or so with a Rock for my pillow. And when I awoke Mars had set in the west and the waning Moon had risen and cast a wan glow upon the locked gates. And I looked more closely and noticed with a dull eye that a panel in the gates had slid open and revealed a grille behind which was a sign. And upon this sign were written in green letters the words: You are the god of love, so why do you not love me? After this I heard thunder, and what the thunder said was: THE COLLEGE IS

CLOSED. I turned to the south, and noticed a curiously-wrought table with three legs; and upon the table was a golden bowl. I lifted it up in my hands and it fell apart in three pieces. And in a grotto within the bowl fell into my lap a silver key tied with a green ribbon. So I took the key and fitted it into the lock of the gates of paradise. And the gates opened and creaked upon their hinges as if they had never opened in a long time. Then there was revealed to me a vista of a great sooty city, in ruins, of costly palaces which had burned. And I wept, for only owls and dragons could live there, and I ran out through the gates with my hands covering my eyes for I dreaded the loss of so great a city and its inhabitants and cattle. Then I heard the thunder for a third time, and what the thunder said was: Seek ye the worm in the telescope. This was a very great riddle to me. So I wept and wept because the riddle was so great. And after this, I awoke.

And all that remained of God were a few grains of sand upon the throne after the tide went out for one last time, leaving the chair high and dry after the ancient harbour silted up, due to perturbations in the orbit of the Moon after Diana's wrath disturbed the elements. So the throne was high and dry after the tide went out in one, huge swoosh. Sahara reigned here and the whirling sands of the beach curled in eddies around the legs of the throne: to vanish on the deserted beach, to be covered over and the Moon to set forever. I never thought it would end this way: with all the monolithic statuary of a dead culture and the peoples thereof

who spoke dead languages passed into nothingness like their foreign gods. Vacant the expressions of the caryatids; hollow now Isis and Osiris and the gilded sarcophagi in deserted museums. The scrolls forgotten along with who wrote them and why. So the gods evacuated these regions never to return, to there, or anywhere. How can you love a God who is only a few numbers in descending order of series? Hong Kong sets as London rises. Those old lily futures are battling it out on the exchange, with the rose futures. Are we ready for theological revolutions that match Copernicus in disruption of our old beliefs? Distress in Vatican courtyards, when God burps the uncertainty, the falling of old towers, and our presuppositions upon which our self-styled culture rests. Have not many previous worlds and cities convulsed themselves into extinction in similar fashion? At last the world is changing: do not deny me my chance to gloat for my emerging, eternal City.

On an isle in the fabled Sea of Minè rubies and amethysts grown on the shore,
in solution in the ruddy waters, they precipitate between the fossils and geodes
as barnacles grow precious jewels on the fabled sea shore salts dissolved
in the Sea become gems on the gravelly beach where walks alone now a soldier
in tunic red when west winds blow foams in off the disturbed and dancing waters
and the soldier is called by neptunes and mermaids to come consort with them
on the dancing waves so he dives in in the shallow ruddy Sea there like
a dolphin he dives and brings up a green lobster with emeralds growing on its back
as so many worthless jewels for Diana's diadem. By now ruddy Saturn sets to

begin the Age of Gold and Eclogues. Gums drip from the tips of the branches of
so many fir trees and this balsam is used for physick by so many astrologers on
the island where the King tends his Sable Island ponies. Now I think the
winters are not so severe on that volcanic isle, dormant fires do not quench
this Pompeii, this picture painted by Claude, and princesses are disguised as
milkmaids. The caryatids carved on the facade of the King's palace glow
golden in the west light, the air blowing foams in off the shallow sea is electric.
The trees dance, the waves dance. The King sleeps curled up on the shore.
He is not disturbed by lords & ladies picking blueberries at the top of the cliff.
The balsam firs are aromatic, the bay bushes, the junipers are aromatic in
the fullness of this August evening. A sailing ship is seen on the horizon:
with no person on board it steers itself in the stiff winds near Blomidon
bearing Solomon's multi-coloured bed for the nuptials of the soldier we call Parsifal.

After the titanium oxide ore Lunar Torus fell to Earth on Mount Erebus, it was moved in five pieces to Oxford where it was put on display under the dome of the Radcliffe Camera in a glass coffin prelude to an afternoon Orpheus with his narrow, flat hips Let me see Orpheus with his narrow, flat hips Under the dripping gum trees After he left Dorothea Philandros crossed St Mary's Bay and founded there a holy city: Philopolis Royal, which became a great haunt for all the sycophantic dukes who constantly hounded Pasta for her arias. I think Dorothea refused to imitate Dido, and lived to a great age.

The King is melancholic again and reclines upon his couch with his face towards the wall. He has a wound in the thigh which will not heal. Parsifal and Philandros have vine-leaves in their hair. The post upon which the central fan-vault of the chapter-house rests passes through the Torus. The Torus, in the proportions of its four elements, governs Philopolis Royal from the very centre, as a legendary stone under the seat of the throne of the kings of Cornwall did in former times. But the former times are passed and the minor poets of a new Silver Age cram the King's Library. Wanly wanders the Queen down the King's Gallery on a rainy morning. Under the gilded frescoes rotates the Greek Venus upon her plinth. The Queen, like Eva, is sightless, like the Greek nude which gazes with sightless eyes this rainy morning. The masons are not yet finished the vaults of the new banqueting-hall. Hard by Clare College the new Hall, like the New Age, is rising.

After breakfast the Queen said to the King, It is not good for the man to be alone. So a messenger was sent out to retrieve knight Parsifal who was on a Quest on the North Shore. Parsifal resisted, as he claimed he had not yet at all concluded the Quest. But he was told by Merlin that the Quest of the factor of monumentality could be continued at the castle with Philandros. At this he relented and agreed to return to the castle to live in an angle of the palace courtyard with Philandros and spend an hour each morning seeking the Factor on a pension from the archdiocese. It was over twelve years since he began his Quest, and so far had failed.

So: I live in a fog of changing numbers and vanishing gods.
The gods appear like the ghost of Hamlet's father, and soon disappear or morph into some other god upon the damp marshes of that vicinity.
Like Prince Hamlet I have no time for Ophelia. Woe to Britain, for the British household gods have moved to Nova Scotia to set up rude camp here.
The clouds in the skies this pacific December remind me of Vita Sackville-West, or Lytton Strachey. These clouds are Nova Scotian clouds, yet when I visit Kent or Bloomsbury, I feel nothing there, only a vast longing to return to Canada and feel the feeling of the Vita Sackville-West clouds there.
These English feelings felt in Canada only come in fits and starts.
With the passing of the decades the feelings grow stronger, like a quickening pulse. 'Cambridge imagined in Nova Scotia', is not the same as being in Cambridge. To get mail from England, better than being there now.

Alas, alas for the Fool is dead. Who now will make the King cheerful?
And he used to talk bawdy to the King, and morality to the Prince
of Wales. The Prince of Wales is a gentleman, thought the Princess
in the privacy of her chamber. A new shadow approaches across the dead land.
A vast sigh, heaves the wind, in the sterile January air, before the snow falls.
Ivy crowned the statues, in Nova Scotia of 45 degrees where magnolias will grow.
In between the torrid and the frigid zones, we dwell where the Gulf zephyrs graze
us. So in the winter, when it is dull and grey, it is mild; so when it is bright
and sunny, it is cold and windy with the winds coming in from the north-west.

Like a vast sigh, or a benediction, across the waste land in the winter
when only a mouse creeps out of his nest, and the hills are screaming for
snow. Soon the winds of March will boom across the hills. Against a
foundation wall maybe a lone crocus will peep out its star in February, if you are
lucky. Gardening is rewarding and evocative: the shy fuchsia will come back
for many years if he is happy against a warm wall. Is not the scotia the
part of a Vitruvian column structure: so the desolate farms in winter only cry out
for Vitruvius transplanted to Mooseland, where he will indeed thrive and grow.
Who will try to coax Vitruvius to live in Pictou County, in Hants or Cumberland
Counties? The King says he is braced by our cleansing frosty gales.
When the garden beds are hard as concrete, the lavender sleeps under a bed of
shaggy old spruce boughs. The cure for cabin-fever induced by a blizzard:
shovelling the snow the following dazzlingly sunny day. I exult in the keenness.

Europe is a great labyrinth, surely; is there at last a centre to this Eurocentric puzzle? This is a myth: a young man goes to Cambridge, becomes ill, returns against his will to the barren culture of Canada. He gradually heals and cleaves to Nova Scotia for the rest of his life: renouncing Europe and her concentric circles, webs of deceit and intrigue. But is there a heart to the yew maze? Perhaps a yellow tea rose bush at the middle of it; or a statue garden-god? This search for God or a god in the endless folds of his cortex: a brain running out of control, must be slowed down in order to solve the puzzle, or to conclude at last that there was no

puzzle after all: just an over-active imagination, mental fevers brought about by the too-mild Anglia spring. This young man was used to the remorseless winters of Canada, unprepared for the delicate, nuanced culture of Europe. So he became lost in his search for the garden-god. Lost for thirteen long years: people said, You are beside yourself with too much study. Go for a walk upon the barren beaches of Minas. Cool down your brain in the wintry blasts. Do not lose grip of the superiority of Canada to England. But all this was so much to ask of this young man. So Europe remained an enticement, a delusion. He went, at last, by his own admission, beyond Europe and Cambridge. So Europe could only ever be a partial satisfaction to his ranging, roving, restless mind. The centre of the maze is reached, at last. Perhaps. He yearns for closure, which delays and delays in coming. Subliminal messages generated by the monumental architecture were a constant tease to his restless curiosity.

It was never from the first a plan of Philandros to subvert Holy Church or to hijack religion and raise it to a higher plane of pure number. As time went on, Kant replaced Jesus, much to his imagined chagrin, and numerology the intricate web of systematic theology. Many accused him of dabbling in dark arts, but he did not see it this way: he continued every Sunday to go to Mass. If anything, he was given to adoring Our Lady more than Jesus, and seeing her as being in a covert way a creature higher than her Son. But he was in a pickle because at that time he did not wish to jettison religion for pure philosophy or

his new-fangled theory of architecture and aesthetics which few people would be likely to accept. So he wished to incorporate Holy Church into his system and thereby elevate it, and show and feel the need to incarnate mere dry dusty numbers, whatever those numbers in his Christian numerology were. But the numbers had a funny way of always popping up with renewed vigour over the great Christian system, and demanding to be asserted in their own right as subsuming (is that the right word?) all of religion into a new metaphysic which was at the same time rooted in the description of an anatomical imperative. But still he went to Mass. It got him out for the fresh air, out of the house, he explained to himself. But he was still a youngish man in search of love. This was Parsifal's quest too. Both were fastidious when it came to love. Both wanted heart to rule as well as head. Neither could really love unincarnated numbers. But anatomies informed by the architectural factor would solve the puzzle.

Part 2: A Spy in the House of God

The goal of the nine month mission was to locate the Mood Machine, and then to smuggle it out of Great Britain. It was located in the ideal architecture of Cambridge, where it generated pulsations of a Universal Ethos through the æther. This was the goal: to find out what was the unseen source of the dream-time that pervaded the damp alleys and courtyards of the university city. All were atheists there because Cambridge itself was the religion, but few bothered to analyse what caused the milieu that was pervasive there in the first place. Nova Scotians were starved for an Old World culture, but lacked the means to attain to that level of cultivated sophistication. So one was chosen to go into that hazardous place to try and decipher the code. It was engraved upon the stones there. It was in the very air of the place and - whatever it was - caused the atmosphere that was the glory - and the downfall - of so many that had gone before. But he had to discover the co-ordinates of this Mood Machine, write them down

on the back of an envelope, and pass through customs to bring them to meagre and pathetic Canada. I mean Canada was pathetic compared to southern England. And so the agent was subversive and a spy where he was going. This hijacking of the very precious household gods of the British Empire was a difficult task. England was bound to resent his presence there for that clandestine mission, a mission that would - if successful - explode the myth of British superiority and bring to North America real power, a tiger by the tail. The Factor would at last become generalized across the world: Britain's secret of cultural success at last uncovered. Those who guarded the Crown Jewels would be aghast.

Fog settles in for another boring spring evening in the colonial seaport town: Hollis Street, Morris Street, Bishop Street. It brings with it its static spell of sleepy, literary afternoons, of empty tea-cups and the orange-cake put away for another day. This spell suggests the coming of a bored ghost who will not leave and who hovers just above the tops of the linden trees around Government House. Bored in the colonies, longing for Trinity Great Court states of mind, in spellbound Halifax, Nova Scotia. Who will dispel this longing for other shores, in the empty streets in Halifax on another boring spring afternoon. Spring in Nova Scotia is a cold, metaphysical affair: the rhododendrons are slow to start to grow, the flowers are slow to come on this coast where the fogs waft in over the linden trees. Let us bestir ourselves, go for a walk down by the rotting docks at the foot of Bishop Street; I will clean up the tea-things when we get back. No, the bored ghost does not leave

and I give in for an afternoon nap. It is evening and so I turn on the lamps and hope for rain. But it does not rain on this James-like day of another century. The house is old, the doors creak on their hinges, the stairway is crooked and the chimney-pots lean dangerously. But nothing falls, only the fog which wraps itself around the house, and I fall asleep. There are cake-crumbs in the carpet, there is dust on the window-ledges and the house-paint is cracked and peeling. I am a tenant in this backwater of civilization: the spring fogs rot the front porch which ought to be torn down and hauled away. But who will do this for me today?

The imaginary Lady flits down the corridors of the palace of the King of Time. The King is robed in robes of green and gold. He is melancholic again because the spring blossoms are faded and fallen. So blind Queen Eva plays for him a curious sarabande upon the cembalo. The fires in the grates burn with flames purple and green this cold summer morning. Candles in the dome ignite fire in the centre of the palace where this ménage à cinq gathers for a late cold supper. The Lady in gray flits back and forth through the enfilade of doorways in the south front while the clavichord soothes the King who reclines with his face to the wall. She passes five mirrors on her vain journey, and sees in each the fading shadow of her wan smiles. Five times she passes and at last she looks in the last of the series of looking-glasses. Intersection of this ménage results in implosion of the central dome with no loss of life or damage to the precious frescoes. The King of Time is a new invention

in this pentagonal palace, draughty on a rainy Monday morning when candles in the dome must be lit for a game of bridge-plus-one. The King's Fool invented this peculiar game for five adults: one woman and four men. A gyroscope governs the length of each game. The pope's birthday is celebrated with venison pie and stale mead. The altar Easter lilies in the castle chapel are limp and brown and soon to be tossed out for compost in the kitchen gardens. The Fatima is adored once again and the holy candles lit smell like toast. The imaginary Lady in gray at last ceases her questing and rolls to a complete stop beneath the burnt dome.

Malcolm and Patricia emerged into the courtyard through a very small door to be faced with the arches of the facade of the Hawksmoor Library which re-created on its facade a series of explosions in stone. How peculiar, they both thought, to see explosions followed by implosions culminating in the grand staircase dome at the north end to show a Universe which would never collapse in an awful way. Bilateral symmetries showed how one universe came into being, then fell in upon itself because of a design flaw which the architects tried to work out by trial and error. Such commotions, they murmured to one another, and cataclysms worked out silently in stone. So too, sinister was the collapsing left half to emerge on the other side as dextrous fingers within a glove of mauve chamois leather. The building was a representation of The Flood which deluged the old, bad world. But others revolve forever, without ever finding the answer

and detecting the design flaw. This took aeons. Yet the library was all put up by the masons employed by King and College in seventy years. After thinking these few thoughts, Malcolm and Patricia ascended the old staircase and moved down through the central hall of the library. Encountered down the central axis were a few phenomena of ball lightning, and they dodged these as best they could. As they approached the bust of the dead Queen they heard announced in the thick air the word: Checkmate. Upon hearing this word, they moved their positions upon the black and white marble floor to allow the King of Time and the imaginary Lady to collide.

The Dictionary of Homeros was discovered by Parsifal in the Vatican Library when he was on a quest in Italy. After this he was assailed by the cunning one at night by Jesus porno culture dreams. All this was a mystery to the chaste knight. Philandros wrote to him in a letter: When the Moon turns from white to red, rest assured, the Dark Man is near. Parsifal wrote back in a long epistle: The Valley of the Shadow of Death lies between the kitchen and the living-room. In the palace where he was staying the wind gusted down corridors to plastered rooms, empty, and falling from the cornice. Then it rained for a fortnight. In that room the fruit were like a bowl full of planets. Although he now stood disarrayed, like Japanese lanterns in a vase. The Sun lies parched and faint and in his grave. So it was winter when Parsifal was in the Vatican Library, mightily perplexed by

all the strange manuscripts he found there. Treatises on alchemy, Arabic dissertations, dusty books in an alien script: all collected and placed there by the Mannerist cardinal, father of the King of Time, and other great leaders on Europe. The withered leaves and tumbled heads of freezing roses that seemed to grow in such a cold November, in Rome, hard by the friary where he was living in a cold cell until his searches were complete. Philandros wrote in another letter: O, ripe fruit dropped is heavy, dropped from the ends of loaded boughs is ready. This was a code. At this Parsifal packed up and left for Heliopolis.

The Ante-Room was decorated with green panels of trophies while the Marble Tribune was of chaster pietra serena stone. The Queen of Jupiter and her delegation were in the Ante-Room, prior to the signing of a grave, solemn agreement. The Tribune was of Vitruvian proportions, discovered by a student of Palladio: a Corinthian Volume generating moods and Factors of Monumentality. Because the scene was so solemn, the Queen of Jupiter had decided to adorn her full, fully displayed bosom with male rubies from Europa. The malachite clock on the severe table struck midnight, and the nude Nubian Honour Guard inspected foreskins, as was the custom in those places at that time. The Ephesian Foreign Legion wore only silver-gilt thoracic armour, and sandals. Several of these men were young, and swooned when they saw the Queen's exposed bosom. On her full skirts were embroidered the fantastic images of ears and eyes. Mars and Jupiter were now at peace.

Aztec House was fully lit for this sombre event at midnight with hundreds of spermaceti candles. Tiny phials of chartreuse were passed around, and the Queen and her soldiers and those of the other delegation drank it down. The Queen then swept out through the Ante-Room outside into an awaiting gondola drawn by four dolphins to take her to Ganymede where a gayer festivity was waiting. Here the High Commission from Mercury had put on a ball. The nude Nubians and Ephesians had gone on ahead to make ready. Architectural theory was fully in practise here. The Ionic Volume on Venus informed the new archbishop of the arrival of the Queen of Jupiter.

The sands of the Libyan Desert covered the ancient city where the oases converged upon the spot where the Stone of Scone fell to Earth. Here all was lost: costly buildings elaborately decorated with electrum. Here the cattle were lost in a sandstorm. Here Humpty Dumpty fell to Earth from an alien constellation, for the king's men could not put him back together again. Here the Red Queen was born, later to rush madly about, and drag her young friend to where she did not want to go. Here the obelisks capped with electrum were felled and broken upon the ground: symbols of a broken dynasty. So I wandered among the sarcophagi and mused upon the lost people and their lost lives and wishes and desires and hopes and dreams. So too what will happen to us in a thousand years, after we are dust to be blown about and around the Libyan deserts. The winds blow the sand now this way, now that, so I cannot tell what was you and what was me on this desolate summer solstice.

In this desert the dragons live, and the owls flutter about the ruined palaces in the gloomy twilight. Here three trails met in the desert, where a junction of paths bringing incense from the East was founded the lost city. A broken obelisk cannot be re-erected, the electrum stolen by the grave-robbers. A Red Queen exists in my brain only on damp days, she will not survive the heat of this Sahara oasis. The legend of the great king who dwelt here remains upon the columns of the temple in hieroglyphs. I cannot decipher this legend. And I do not think my sister, the princess, can either: for the key to the legends is lost, and the necromancers' occult knowledge is passed into nothingness.

The Lady of Perpetual Help protected Parsifal against the malaise of Europe which was a part of its attraction. There was no malaise in Pictou County, no malaise in the hectares of stunted black spruce forests. So Parsifal did not find Our Lady there: there being no need for an absent God. But God was too much with us in dusky Europe. The mantle of history was very great there. As some people fall ill in Florence, Salzburg from the excess of culture there, so Parsifal was well in a wooden house in Pictou County. But how he was bored! There must be a happy mid-Atlantic mean between the illness in the lures of Europe, and the barren life of the Pictou backwoods: split wood, carry water, wait for spring which never comes. But the latter had its attractions too. He couldn't put his finger on it: this spirit that was the secret of the cold wind in the spruce trees. Perhaps Pictou was the only place where he could gather his thoughts

and settle down to work on his system. Europe had sought a system and two world wars and continuing strife proved that this system was old-fashioned, defunct and bankrupt. So Parsifal had to begin from scratch in the Pictou backwoods. The gentle religion of the Mi'kmaq tribes drew him inexorably to the Minas Basin, where dwelt Glooscap. The Five Islands and Cape Blomidon were a pure architecture which satisfied as Chartres did not. As time went on, the thought of Florence and Salzburg made him sick. A voice whispered in his ear, to leave all that behind and to split wood, carry water, wait for spring which never comes.

The king was hunting in the bois in Hants County while the pear was swelling in the bough in shape irregular, baroque, while the hunting lodge under the chestnuts was Rococo. No tourists here, it being a different time and place for the capture of the white Hart in the woods of the king who was recovered from his wound. Now it was his turn to fatally wound the white Hart on the ground covered with fallen ash leaves like so many leaves of gold fluttering down in the still air. The Minas touch works its magic on this still afternoon with the touch of gold and various shades of deep to pale yellows. So the king touches the fallen Hart and turned him to silver again, to frolic and play under the king's chestnut trees in County Hants. The hunting lodge - Sans Souci - opened outward with windows French to capture the balminess of this October afternoon. The king was hunting

in the royal forests of Hants County in the enchanted bois in Royal County Hants on such an afternoon when the pear is swollen upon the bough. The queen gathers the golden pears and returns to the hunting lodge under the over-arching chestnut trees and poaches the golden pears in sherry for the king. Every pear sucks golden nectars from the bough for the last time and the japonica bush is heavy laden down with quinces. A lazy golden afternoon of pears and quinces and kings and queens of horse chestnut trees spreading their broad branches by the lodge - Sans Souci.

We are lost, we are dead: we are the doomed ones. The priest fumbles with the holy book, flipping from page to page. He cannot find the right prayer for the Feast of the Assumption. The altar boys shuffle from foot to foot. They are nervous, embarrassed for the priest who cannot find his way in the Book. The organ groans: it gives no help either. Now it is Good Friday. The elements are disturbed. It is a wild and dark windstorm outside. The electricity fails. We are cold, in darkness. The wind roars. God does not descend. He is happy and warm in heaven, so why come down here to these doomed people in a dreary suburban church? The people who have walked in darkness have remained in darkness. Who will unseal the Great Book? The Virgin King tries, and fails. The King of the Night has plunged us into a great gloom, and there is no help for us, miserable offenders. There is too much fire on the

altar. The candles are out of control. The priest sucks up the wine. I think there is too much wine drunk in this church; the water in the stoups is all dried up. Who will bless the water and replenish the stoups? And we gaze with sightless eyes at the stained glass of the Virgin over the altar. She is happy and warm in her heaven. She will not come down here. At last the Mass is over, and this spy in the House of God can go home. I walk through the flying sleet and freezing rain to return to my room in a cold house at the poorer end of town at the poorer end of time. And I pray in my narrow room for a return of the vistas: Light by Claude.

Cathedral moods on winter afternoons. The smell of prayer books in the cool, humid church. My mother and I shovel snow all afternoon. The air smells of melting snow: but do not deceive yourself, spring is not yet. The paperwhites are nearly spent. The Minas Basin is choked with cakes of reddish ice. The shaggy, black spruces shake stiffly in the wind. Now the wind has swung around: a change of weather. The dusty Christmas ornaments are all put away for another season. The preacher in church tells us to be ready for the return of Jesus. But I have my doubts. This is Hants County: the North Shore. Miracles do not happen here. My father is in bed: he is ill. I bundle up to bring in more firewood, or to go out to get the mail. Maybe a letter from England for me. But no, not this time. This is an austere kind of civilization. My mother seems happy in the kitchen: cutting up squash, putting on a roast of pork for supper.

After lunch my mother and I have to go out to shovel more snow. It is still, and the skies are dove-gray. My back does not tire. It is very deep in the drift there by the swamp. The car is broken-down. But I am not hopeless: I dream extravagant dreams at night. I am an undergraduate again, in St John's College. The snow changes texture as the wind changes direction. I am kept aloft on all sides as I mechanically shovel, by essences or emanations of All Souls, Oxford. Eight flower buds are discovered on the agapanthus in the living-room, and this counts as the biggest event, or miracle, in East Walton, Hants County.

Fennish moods waft in off the cold North Atlantic inducing mild fits of glandular fever - hazard of living in the Fens - but which can be caught now in transformed Nova Scotia, too. This fever is the result of too strenuous mental activities; before, I was apathetic in the colonies, thinking only of how I could 'get back': tormented by the memories of what it was like 'when I was at Cambridge'. Now is the time that that peculiar essence is made available in harsh Nova Scotia, leading me to do more positive activities, instead of longing for the impossible dreams of a fevered imagination. Over twenty years since I left, the winters here, too, are milder, mild enough to walk in street shoes on a foggy winter's morning in Halifax. The 'essence' of Cambridge at last generalized and made available for thirsty cultures in need of the Cambridge zing and zip and giddy hilarity hitherto encountered only in its original form

in the haunted town in the Fens. Abstracted virus of the place which induces glandular fever among the brighter undergraduates in the Colleges along the murky Cam. Murky river of dreams fantastical, of intellects unsurpassable, of cold swamp fevers which unsettle those most committed to a discovery which would make the whole world share in the divine milieu of the place. But am I hurrying here too quickly towards conclusion? All my time is almost up: I am near the end of my Quest for the Holy Grail which animates the place and which is the source of the Spirit of the place. I am content to stay in sparse Nova Scotia since this spirit has been brought to me.

The piano on the piano nobile is locked and out of tune. The caryatids on the west front gaze into the setting sun, like statues looking seaward. The March winds are booming across the hills like guns along the horizon. Woe, woe, for the golden bowl is cracked and broken: who will put it together again? The Virgin in the chapel sheds an unnoticed tear. The stone altars that used to be in the chapel have been removed and dumped at the end of the garden; the idols have had their heads lopped off. The garden god creeps into the vacuum, as nature abhors a vacuum. There I hear a dull rustling in the foliage. Look, behind you, for there a shadow falls across the lawn. The surface of the water of the canal is disturbed, in this flat land. It is dusk, time for bed and closing of eyes, even for sightless caryatids whose gaze towards the sea is inscrutable. A piano nocturne is heard in the distance. Nectarines from Chile adorn a French pewter dish on the table by the mantel.

Even the carp have gone to sleep; the spring flowers close their petals and hyacinths close down their humid perfume. Where now is God in his fury, in his anger? The end of the world has been put off so long we at last forget it, and fall asleep: the sleep of the just. Where now are heaven, hell? All I hear are the small birds twittering in the leafless quince bushes. Stone horses are ready to jump down from the chapel facade. All is facade. The nocturne lingers in the peaceful garden. But who is playing upon the piano on the piano nobile? I do not know: do not bother me now with such questions. The poet lingers in the garden of his creation, a city where only ghosts dwell.

THE END

2004, Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, Canada.