

Two

2.0

Sixty-five years ago my father and grandfather went for a walk on one of the mountains that form the spine of the Olympic peninsula. They hiked most of the day. As it began to get dark, my father was told they were lost and would be spending the night on the mountain. When you are lost it is important not to become too cold, too tired or more lost than you already are. It is better to wait for the light of day. My grandfather in his savage familiarity with wild places curled up and fell asleep under a tree. He slept the whole night through. My father hardly closed his eyes. The air was cool and damp. He was hungry. But the worst by far was that his fear flared with every creak and groan of the northern rain forest. A few minutes before the sky began to brighten, my grandfather woke, stretched and led his son not more than a quarter mile to the car parked on the side of a fire road. My father was fourteen and his father sixty-five.

A little Eskimo boy had been flown in from Alaska for some sort of operation; after he was taken off his IV he seemed healthy but would not eat. The staff tried everything. He spoke no English. When my mother came on duty, she sent one of the aides down to the market for fresh mackerel. She offered the fish whole and raw. The boy devoured it. My father's father adored my mother. I was born in his house and we lived with him until I was six months old. At that time, my father, twenty-five, was a graduate student and my mother, twenty-three, the supervising nurse on the night shift at a pediatric hospital in Seattle.

Even if my father did not, my mother wanted her own household. Granddad bought us a little place near a lake just outside of town. I have seen a picture of it. Before I was three, that house was sold and we were living in New York. A few years later, we moved back to Seattle. I turned five in a little house tucked into the hills over the city-center and we were back in

New York before I was six. My grandfather visited us in New York for a week a few months before he died – I was seven. He took pictures of us in the Washington Square Mews.

He took beautiful photographs: the view of the sound from the living room; the garden in deep snow taken in the half-light during a heavy fall. He had a collection of ancient Leica cameras and light meters my father could never properly operate. Granddad took our baby pictures: my brother and I playing in the gladiolas and snapdragons of his garden tumbling down the hillside in terraces below Magnolia Boulevard. I caught bees when they crawled into the snapdragons and kept them in jars.

My memory of grandfather's house in Seattle is sketchy. I have a sense of the alley out back, the stairs down to the kitchen, the living room with its Victorian sofas of mahogany and complicated fabric, woven carpets. I have a strong impression of the view of Puget Sound from the living room – but I cannot really sort out whether the view through the long wall of plate glass is an original impression or a conflation of photographic images I have seen from early childhood. Memory. I am sure I don't have an original impression of my grandfather's bedroom. I was never in the room. But I do have an image of it in my head. There are stacks of yellowing newspapers and magazines floor to ceiling bound in string through which paths allowed one to move about the room. The picture I have of his bedroom belongs to my own imagination. I learned about his bedroom from stories. I was told that his wife, a woman I called her "grandma" only after his death, had her own room. He slept on a sun porch filled with enormous jade plants that had to be cut down in order to move them off after his death. I have lived long enough to know that not all my memories coincide with the memories of others who were there. Such differences may be beyond resolution. Like Hesiod's muse, the past sometimes speaks truth and at other times falsehood, and man is

powerless to discern the difference. It is the nature of the past to be unreliable and incomplete.

A few months before my fifth birthday, I climbed down the back stair in the dark and went into the kitchen where I found my grandfather preparing his breakfast: a concoction of who-knows-what in what must have been one of the first blenders sold in America. After a massive coronary at forty-eight, my grandfather changed his life. He became interested in whole grains, wheat grass, alfalfa tea and black strap molasses. This particular morning, he poured out his drink, vile to behold, drank it and then picked up an orange. With a knife too sharp for a little boy to touch, he began sweeping away the skin in one long continuous peel. He must have noticed how carefully I was watching him. He handed me the peel. I put it back together and formed an empty ball. Then he put the knife in one of my hands and an orange in the other. Did he speak to me? I tried to keep the knife steady. The peel broke. He gave me another orange and then a pile of apples. One by one I bared the fruit to its flesh long past any desire to eat.

Because he was willing to teach me how to use a knife, to allow me to hold it in my hand and cut the fruit or my fingers as I would, he also took me fishing. I can barely make out the impression of the splintered wood of a rough and uneven little dock standing out into a pond. There is the shadow-presence of someone else in my thought. I was catching trout. Somewhere along the line – too excited to speak or even quite notice – I wet my pants. Too many fish and it was raining. I am not sure when I discovered that the pond was stocked. I believe my father told me but I do not remember. It seemed at the time as if I might have walked on the surface of that pond there were so many fish – a mass of gulping faces staring up at me through the slick surface reflecting the darkness of the sky. And it occurs to me now – and for the first time – that pond was probably not open to the public. The shadow-presence was someone my grandfather knew – the owner or the caretaker of the fishery.

I could smell the pee in my trousers when I got in the car and was embarrassed. Granddad did not notice. Brown corduroy trousers. Once upon a time there was a bedspread made out of the same material. I have a memory of the feel of the material against my face. Homecoming with granddad and all those fish was a little hectic. I was soaking wet. My father produced a camera with a flash. I was mostly overwhelmed but in the picture I am smiling. I didn't understand what it meant to catch so many fish. Only once again, just a few years ago, fly-fishing with my father-in-law in the ocean off Catalina when we got into a huge school of bonita, did I ever catch so many fish in such a short time. Somewhere there is a picture of me standing in the kitchen in my yellow rain coat, black rain boots and brown corduroy trousers with a string of trout a yard long. Like the tiny shard of glass from the kitchen floor that has worked its way into the ball of my foot, a shard I sometimes feel but never find, I do not remember the sound of my grandfather's voice.

2.1

At just over ten thousand feet, Horsefly is the highest point on the Uncompahgre Plateau. The long narrow ranch cuts across the lower reaches of the mountain. To the east, a ridge of fourteen-thousand-foot peaks obstructs the sun for almost an hour after dawn breaks. A ragged wall of rock and snow. Pure Colorado. I drove up to Ridgeway from Los Angeles in about eighteen hours, found the ranch, worked the locks and gates with a flashlight and got to sleep by midnight. On Election Day, I killed an elk in the timber.

It is commonly said that elk are everywhere and nowhere. I hunted the south end of the ranch for a full three days without seeing an elk or any fresh sign. On the fourth morning, pre-dawn, I was in my truck crawling along the ranch road when I spotted tracks of a good sized group in the wash of

the headlights. I was excited. The elk were up wind from the road. The herd of perhaps thirty or forty animals had pushed across the road sometime during the night, grazed in the pasture next to the ranch headquarters and then moved into the several thousand acres in timber that covered most of the middle sections of the ranch. I waited in the truck. A half hour before dawn – the start of legal shooting hours – I got out. There is no point looking for elk in the dark. If I should have run into them before I was able to shoot them, there would have been a mad crashing of big shapes and then they would have moved – maybe twenty miles before they stop. Look for elk with a rifle. Just before the sun came up, I started out straight into the wind. Elk are seldom found downwind.

Once I entered into the forest of mixed pine and aspen, I moved slowly and deliberately behind the herd. I expected the elk to be spread out all though the well-spaced trees grazing and quiescent. But they might have been anywhere. At ten o'clock in the morning, I walked right up on a cow resting under a group of small pines. She startled me. It had taken me more than three hours to cover the last mile – one foot in front of the other. How had I not seen her before? How had she not seen me? When I saw the cow, she was no more than sixty yards away lying in the snow under a copse of stunted pine. If one moves very slowly and carefully, keeping one's face into the wind, it is not terribly difficult to walk up on elk. I froze and then slowly found my way to the ground. She was casually chewing and looking about. I watched her for about fifteen minutes with my rifle across my knees. The light air was backing. She must have winded me. With moderate urgency the old cow continued to sample the air as she found her legs. She had her nose high in the breeze. She wasn't panicked. Spooked, elk bolt and are gone in seconds. I suspect she only had a whiff of me and could not really tell where I was – all she knew was there was a human somewhere. The rest of the herd condensed from the shadows, fell in behind

her and all of them moved off at a trot in single file. The line of elk strung out behind the cow wound through the trees and bushes then crossed the draw moving smartly up the hillside rising gently to the north. They were gone in a moment. I continued to sit still and moved my eyes back into the wind. I continued to search out the deepness of the trees and shadow. Sometimes a bull will hang back concealed. A big bull has also learned when not to move.

I remained still for twenty minutes or so, rose and cautiously walked over to where the cow had lain on the ground. Exploring the area, I studied her tracks and the tracks left by the herd. Tracks point more and less explicitly to ways in which the world has been. In following tracks, I tried to read how it happened, the whole of it. The narrative gets richer as I am able to pay more attention, not only to the tracks themselves – how each is made, its depth, the condition of the track wall – but also what is around the tracks. In paying attention to the marks of the animal, I fall into the world of the elk. Questions foster answers that foster more questions. What were these creatures doing here – sleeping, feeding or just moving through? Did an animal break that branch or bend down that grass? Why were they moving in this direction and not another? Were they going somewhere specific or just wandering? What is ahead of them and what is behind? By studying the tracks of animals I have observed, I have learned about some of the differences in the tracks between an animal that is grazing, animals that are simply moving through on their way to somewhere else, and elk that are spooked.

The ground was patchy with snow where I had first seen the cow. I found her impression. All around her were the tracks of the rest of the herd grazing through the light snow. Many of these marks looked like comets with long tails. Elk graze with their noses to the ground and also they do not pick up their feet much at all. Not only do they leave the tracks of their noses sliding across the ground, they tend to set a hoof and

then as they move on from that spot lightly drag the edge of that same hoof across the surface of the ground before picking it up in order to set it down flat again to bear their weight. When elk trot they are reasonably clean stepping. When elk run the tracks get deeper and wider. Running, the cloven hooves of these large and powerful ruminants splay as they hit the ground. When they pick up their feet again, the hooves contract, grab and so toss chunks of snow or mud in their wake. I find the tracks of running elk in groups of four at least fifteen feet apart, sometimes further.

Tracking is like reading a text. When I read a book, I am already leaning in the direction the sentence is going. What this means is that in following what is being said, I am leading the text. In the same way I pick up a glass within the possibility of drinking water, in being there with what is being said between us, I have already reached out ahead of the words spoken in the direction in which we are going. It is only because I do not distinguish myself from what is being said or who is saying it when I read or speak that it is possible to move along with the words on the page. Without leaning into the future the world does not appear: everything that shows up for me shows up as having been. Surprise is created when the world turns up otherwise than I understood the world to be. Surprise is only possible because, in reading text or in tracking an animal, I anticipate.

There are obvious differences between reading tracks and a book – the intention of the author to communicate something at least seems to be one of the most important differences – but both kinds of reading, books and animal tracks, have to do with and entering into and falling from the flow of what is being read. One moves with the text or the tracks until one is stopped. Something has shown up as unintelligible. At that place it is necessary to consider, to look about for clues, to reconstruct the situation anew, attempting to draw upon the availability of the world in which the texts or the tracks make

sense. One is always inclined forward in following an animal in the field even if there are different modes of being ahead of what is happening. Not every kind of anticipation makes possible surprise.

It takes a story to track an animal, not just marks on the ground. The tracks I do not immediately see are nevertheless still there. It is a method of tracking to find each one. Sometimes I must calculate where the next track should be and look there. To calculate is another mode in which one looks ahead. I have already started to speculate about, or fall into a sense of, what the animal is doing. It is browsing and grazing under the snow. In trying to find every track, I fall into the rhythm and gait of the beast. I have read that certain Apache scouts were able to track ants moving over rock. The rocks apparently have a thin covering of dust and if one looks closely enough one may be able to find the disruptions in the dust film. I don't know if I believe everything I have read about the Apache tracker, but it is a fact that the more I understand about the animals I am following, the richer my understanding will be of what the particular animal was doing when it made the marks I follow. Not much may mean a lot. Tracking is about moving at the right speed – that speed seems always to be slower.

A heavy bull with a big rack of horn sometimes leaves a dewclaw mark at the back of his track if he is not moving too quickly. Because of his weight his whole foot is pressed down. But I was not looking for a big bull. I was looking for any bull. Any antlered animal with four points on either side was legal and would fill out my tag. I hoped I might come across a young bull moving with the cows or perhaps in a small group of other bulls. Mature bulls, the ones that have won the right to breed, and won that right with their large and impressive antlers, pretty much disappear. I don't believe there were any on the ranch. But who knows?

The big mature males tend to be either where they cannot be legally hunted or tucked up in special hiding places way

out of the way. A big bull sometimes waits in his 'nest' for rifle season to end. A few years ago, while hunting chukar in Eastern Oregon at the tail end of deer season, I came across a big mule deer buck up on the very top of the highest hill in the area. He was a spectacular buck: a five by five with huge heavy bases and a lot of separation. When I thought about it, I realized he knew I was there long before I saw him. I never really had much of a shot had I been trying to kill him. After a moment, it occurred to me why he was up there on that little top. He liked to keep track of who his visitors were. I looked around and could see by the myriad of his big tracks and abundance of scat that he had been on that hill top quite a while. Something similar happens with bull elk. Rifle season begins right after the rut. After the rut the bulls, at least the big ones, and any bull that is going to get big, seem to move to a hidden place: the end of a canyon with a back door or a thick stand of pine of no more than a few acres that provides some kind of advantage. Near some kind of water source, they may remain as long as six weeks or so, exhausting the food supply – which just happens to exhaust the hunting season. By staying put and not moving, the bull leaves no tracks to his hiding place. In most of the mountain areas, a trophy bull in his nest cannot be tracked, unless one were to happen upon his tracks within a couple of days of him settling into his hiding spot or discover his path to water. And if I were simply to stumble onto a bull nest, I would have to do so in such a way that I would not bust him out of it. The wind is so likely to give me away. To hunt these animals, one has to guess where the bull is going to be, and then make an approach on that spot that has carefully taken into consideration the wind. Anticipation. One hunts the possibility of the bull, and so, particularly as a beginner, I often find I have been stalking dreams or ghosts.

A strong steady breeze that keeps your scent well behind you is best. A weak wind, in which the air backs and eddies, is difficult to hunt in because it is constantly changing direction

and if you do not keep your face into the wind and your scent behind, you will never see or hear an elk. I pay attention only to the wind. I don't bother with scent-masking technology. I don't use scentlock or cover scents. Scentlock is the name of a clothing system that involves special materials, rubber cuffs and activated charcoal inserts. It is designed to trap your scent inside a suit. But what you are wearing or how you smell seems always to be trumped by the direction of the wind. An old timer famous for killing big deer once remarked about my scentlock gear, "if the wind is wrong it doesn't matter and if the wind is right it doesn't matter." And so I didn't try to follow the herd as they had moved more or less down wind from me.

Eleven o'clock. I had kept along the big draw I had been working all morning. In places I could see nearly five hundred yards through the scattered trees. If I were able to gain a rest for the rifle, I felt sure I could make a fairly long shot. I was carrying a slightly customized Winchester model 70 chambered in .338 magnum, topped with a high-end adjustable scope from 1.5× through 6× power. I had started using a range finder a couple of years before. Even when I was practicing regularly at guessing ranges, I found I was off by large factors from time to time – particularly at longer distances. Distance is different in the timber or in a pasture or looking down a steep incline. Moving along the edge of the timber up the draw from tree to tree, I was starting to lose some of my concentration. I caught myself daydreaming here and there and would stop and try again to clear my head and bring my attention to the timber in which I was hunting. I smelled the elk before I saw them.

Elk stink. I do not have much of a nose and even I can smell them. When I saw the elk a few minutes later, they were just upwind of me moving along smartly from left to right in a single thread. The closest was probably 150 yards away. If I waited, the group would pass a little closer. I sat down to gain

a rest for my rifle. Placing my elbows resting on my knees to steady my shot, I was running out of time. Breath. There was a group of young bulls in behind the cows. I was spotting the elk through the riflescope as they moved by. I shouldn't do that. I should use binoculars – don't point a rifle at anything you do not intend to kill – but, in as close as I was to the elk and with the elk moving as fast as they were, I was either going to find my bull through the riflescope or I wasn't going to get a shot at him at all. The elk were trotting with their noses up and their heads tilted back looking almost comic. I was pretty sure they had winded me before I had seen them and were leaving the area. Like the cow I had seen an hour before, these elk were not panicked, they just did not know quite where I was.

My rifle is zeroed at two hundred yards. With a 250-grain bullet, the rifle shoots 1.7 inches high at one hundred yards. I am not that well calibrated. The elk had closed my position and were now about a hundred yards off. There seemed to be some legal animals in the group. I started counting points. One bull had four on each side. The one at the end seemed the biggest. I would wait. They were moving a little faster now. One, two, three, four: yes, that little bull is more than legal. I let out half my breath and held it. I could barely feel my pulse. Swinging the rifle as smoothly as I was able, I placed the cross hairs just behind the front leg in the middle of his chest and began to squeeze the trigger. I hardly felt the massive recoil. He went down. The first shot took him clear off his feet. I was pretty sure the shot was a fatal but I did not want him to get up. I worked the bolt and chambered another round. He was trying to collect his feet under him without much success. I steadied the rifle on my knees. I still didn't have time to use the range finder and guessed he was one hundred yards away. I put the crosshairs right on the top of his back, at the base of the neck and fired. I could hear the thud of the bullet. He did not try to get up again.

I gave him twenty minutes to die, and marked the time by my watch. I had been very cool up until that moment, but after he lay there I started to get excited and had to remind myself to be careful. If I come up on him before he is dead, he might bolt. It is amazing how far a mortally wounded elk will run. They are very tough animals. Last year, a friend shot a cow with a fast .30 caliber round from a little too far away. The 180-grain bullet hit her in the chest, got good penetration and the bullet fully expanded, as it should. But traveling as far as it did, the bullet shed a good deal of its energy and consequently the shock value was not as great as it would have been at closer range. Nevertheless, we saw a lot of damage when we cut her open. The cow had run off despite a collapsed lung and a lot of bleeding. We were up all night looking for her and didn't find her until the next morning. She was very weak but still alive.

Twenty minutes later, the bull I had shot lay still. I had already chambered a fresh round: safety on; thumb on the safety; pull the rifle into your shoulder; level it at his chest. I started to come up on him on step at a time. He was over on his side with his head turned awkwardly between his forelegs. His antlers were rolled slightly to one side. He was bigger than I had first thought: a very symmetrical 'five by five' rack (five points on each side). A good-looking animal, he was probably two, maybe even three years old. Elk have miniature tusks inside their mouths called ivories and are the most reliable gauge for guessing age. He was not moving. At ten feet, he looked dead, but a six or seven hundred pound animal getting onto its feet can be more than startling. I approached the bull as mindfully as I was able and lightly touched the tip of the rifle barrel to his eye. He neither blinked nor stirred.

2.2

Why do Americans hunt? If I should be asked this question now, I would answer that we hunt mostly because we do, because we have already done so, because our fathers or our grandfathers hunted, and that we loved them or we hated them. We hunt because hunting is one way in which what has been handed down is manifest. Before I considered hunting, I would have said hunting was instinctual. At the most essential level, I would have presumed that the urge to hunt was bound up with satisfaction or pleasure. I understand that these two ways of answering the question are not mutually exclusive. Both make a claim. A real question is never exhausted by its answer, just as every interpretation is always inadequate to the creation it seeks to express. But my work in these pages was not prompted by a question – not right away. I was not asked why we hunt or even why I hunt, even if these questions have subsequently come up.

I was living with my new wife in a very pleasant working-class neighborhood of Los Angeles. We had a cute house, a broken view of the harbor and were still looking for what was going to direct our marriage. As has been my habit from early childhood, I got up before dawn one morning. I was sleepy and felt especially middle-aged. When I had gone to bed the previous night, my grandfather had not been on my mind. My grandfather had been dead for more than twenty years before I killed my first animal, eleven years in the ground before I bought my first gun.

Standing at the island in the middle of our kitchen in San Pedro, I found myself caught in an uncanny sense of repetition. To remember is also to re-member in the sense of bringing back to life – perhaps aping the Egyptian goddess who put her dismembered brother Osiris back together again and brought him to life. I remembered being four years old, and finding my grandfather in his kitchen doing precisely what I was doing

at that very moment. The repetition felt something like *déjà vu*, but not quite. *Déjà vu* never seems to have consequences. I was caught in a different sense of repetition. It was not that that which was before me was being repeated, I was myself the repetition and there were immediate consequences. I was my grandfather that morning. He had showed up to me as who I was, and of course also who I was not. I was struck by the very odd sense that I was a hunter simply because he had taught me to peel an orange when I was not quite five years old.

2.3

I am capable of imagining the past as perfect or complete, but I remember it otherwise. To remember is to re-experience, and so to experience anew. To remember is to raise the dead. A perfect past is the object about which history is written. Strangely, it does not seem to matter much to me that such an objectified past is not like other objects. I know where my teacup is kept, but I have no idea where to find the past. It does not even seem to be ‘in time,’ which has necessarily passed it by. I only hear tell of the past. All that can be experienced is subject to change and so to decay. The perfected past does not decay. It cannot be remembered. It can only be dreamed.

The past and its history are not synonymous. The difference is expressed in saying that history changes, not the past. The perfected past is taken to be both complete and fixed. What we know about it is what changes. History, like a science, remains open to revision in its hopeless struggle to describe the past. The perfected past is an idea.

In Greek, *the idea of something (eidōs)* is etymologically related to *the look of it*. Originally an idea seems to have had a verbal sense. How something looks is enacted by a concept or an idea. The concept is taken as that which gathers together accidents. But a concept as that activity which gathers together is as misbehaved as language. You know, irony. Language so

often says more than was meant. It has been suggested that the look of some particular entity is what gives me that entity, but this is not something merely theoretic. I fell in love with the look of my first wife when I was thirteen years old. I fell in love with her eidos. Of course more happened after that. A great deal more, but that is how it began. I walked into the living room of my new friend from school, her younger brother, and there she was six inches taller than I, and more beautiful than Helen.

Likewise, I know my dog when I see him. I do not look at a mass of details and then assemble the data into my dog. In speaking of knowing in the sense of recognizing, what is spoken about is a kind of understanding. When I say that I understand something I am saying that I have some kind of familiarity with that something. In a funny way then, it is my understanding of how things go that allows what is to be as it is. In allowing something to be as it is, that something shows up as given.

It is not altogether uncommon to imagine death as carrying one beyond life and all possible (earthly) experience. The place to which one is carried after death is transcendent, and a place to which I have no current access. Nevertheless, I find that I do reach death directly in some of the ways in which I actually come to grips with it. Death in some sense is not completely beyond my experience. Death can be here for me in the mode of my own impending absence. I am not speaking of a theoretic or logical absence, for such an absence is never here or there for anyone. I am referring to the palpable absence of myself that is the condition for the experience of self-encounter. Death, not as the death of the body, but as the penumbrae about my existence, the darkness over my own origin, is actually and explicitly encountered in the absence from which I sometimes emerge into that familiar-strange encounter with myself that is always happening for the first time again. When my mortality is explicitly manifest as a kind of phenomenal finitude, why can I not say that death has been felt?

God has been taken to be an idea: the transcendent source of all that is. But for the believer, God is merely an idea only for the non-believer. The believer says that the non-believer would believe if he would open his heart to God. The philosopher and the scientist each tries to open his own eyes. The believer says he has direct contact with God. He tells us God cannot be conceptually grasped, that God is a personal god (the origin of my experience) and can manifest as such. God may belong, in part and in a way that is difficult to speak about, to experience. Unfortunately, I must offer the phenomenal experience of God on hearsay. I do not claim the experience for myself. I include this experience because I find that not only do I admire the believer, but also that, unaccountably, I myself believe that there are and have been persons to whom God has been known. I am unwilling to say such experiences have been merely subjective and I do not have much reason for my disinclination.

Together with the ideal past, the imagined past that is complete and unchanging, there is the past that may be experienced. I may at some moment remember the past. I might encounter myself inhabiting an explicit possibility that has been handed down to me from the past, and, in so doing, encounter myself as another. I have done so. Like death and God, the past is also phenomenal. The hopelessness of history to exhaust the past depends on the fact that we actually do encounter the past. The ideal always depends on the phenomenal, even when it has forgotten why. Today, science still sleeps in the cradle of the phenomenal but sometimes dreams of overthrowing the tyranny of experience.

Unlike my idea of the past as the object of history complete and unchanging, the past I talk about when asked to consider what the past might be, the past I deal with seems to be simply my understanding of what has happened. The past *is* the story I am caught in and nothing besides. To the extent that I do not believe or trust some particular story I know – such is the

extent to which that story does not count as the past. I say it might have happened that way, or simply I don't know what happened. That the past is my understanding of the past does nothing to weaken the force of the past, does nothing to make it merely theoretical. Rather, the fact that the past I deal with is a collection of stories that may or may not be consistent, says something about the power and originality of narrative. My understanding of how things go is given by a narrative and is, in its very nature, not under my control. Even if the past is a story, I do not get to make up history. The past is given by its history and now, despite my sense of the past in its beforeness, and so in its inaccessibility, I cannot tell history from the past it describes. When history changes because of certain discoveries or insights that befall me, so does my past. When the past changes, I change right along with it. When I discover that I was disliked in high school or loved in college, the way in which I am is no longer the way in which I once was. *Who I am* has changed. That the past can change necessarily throws all my ideas about time into disarray.

2.4

Toward the end of his life, my father would visit me in California where I had moved for the sake of learning to write poems. In the course of working on them, I noticed I was inordinately interested in my grandfather. He was terribly important to me and yet, in a very real sense, I hardly knew him. I lightheartedly mentioned my fixation to my father. I suppose I was expecting to initiate some sort of self-deprecating banter with my father about how silly I was. I doubt I was really thinking much past the surface of my comment. But there was no banter and nothing lighthearted. My father simply said he was not at all surprised by my attachment to my grandfather. I was surprised and asked why he wasn't. He elaborated: your grandfather thought you were perfect. I believed him in an objective way. It seemed

possible. I had seen it in my own life. My mother had felt my children were perfect. But when I asked my father exactly what he meant, he asked me if I were able to remember how hard he, my father, had been on me when I was a little boy. He said this in a completely matter-of-fact manner that emerged from the depth of his own mother's dark brown eyes. Granddad's eyes, as mine are, were a pale blue.

Hector's terrible crest shook along the ridge of his helmet and frightened his son. The child did not know what he was looking at, did not know that the crest was cut from heavy hairs of a horse's tail or that the man before him was even a man, let alone his own father. The boy saw a fiend of flesh and bronze. Had Hector's son seen through the monster to the man and known the armored hero to be his father, the child, nevertheless, would have failed to have recognized that his father's strength, a mere plaything of the gods, would crumble to naught at the gates of their city and that his mother would be led away in slavery; that he, the son and child of the hero, on the point of a spear, would be pitched onto the rocks from the city walls.

When my father explained to me that which was recognizable, I recognized it. He had voiced what I could sense but could not see, and then it was there and it was obvious. My grandfather had loved me. He was powerful. More powerful than my father and so I feared less the slopes of Mount Cithaeron and not *merely* because my grandfather was around, but because he existed at all.

We learned of his passing on a winter weekend in 1959. A telegram. My father was upset but kind. I went with him to a liquor store to cash a check. We were going to leave by train that night for Seattle. I didn't know what to feel. I had to think about my grandfather. I had to imagine being without him forever more. I tried to picture him lying still and dead at the bottom of the stairs. My mother told me the doctor felt granddad's heart attack was so massive he was dead before

he reached the ground. I was seven and we had been living on the other side of the country from my grandfather. I was without him being around most of the time anyway. It took time. After a day or so I began to feel the loss of him and then it got much stronger.

2.5

In understanding one's own people as being swept along by public events, even if family history is always a stream that feeds the history of the nation, there is something peculiar about acknowledging the consequences of one's actions, the actions of one's family, as manifest in the history of the world. The private and the public cannot be kept apart. I have always known that my grandfather was in Alaska at the start of the twentieth century, but it has only recently occurred to me that he was there during the famous gold rush. He may even have told my mother that Eskimos find cooked fish revolting. I don't know. My grandmother and grandfather were together in Alaska from 1902 until 1904. Then she went back to Seattle and he stayed in the north until 1907.

A new mining engineer fresh out of college, my grandfather became the superintendent of a gold-mining operation during the five years he spent in Alaska. In support of his duties he spent one or two winters north of the Arctic Circle living with the local Inuit population – living as if he were in the Stone Age, I should expect. Years ago, I read extensively on the subject and character of these northern peoples. Titles such as *The Incredible Eskimo* begin to express the strangeness, even the exotic nature of this extreme land and those who inhabited it. I am full of impressions of European adventurers and missionaries who became interested in these northern people in the first half of the twentieth century. The Inuit are unimaginably tough, their way of life unimaginably fragile.

I was told when I was very young that my grandmother shot a bear as it came into her cabin or tent. Family stories leach into the soil and lie in layers of possibility, out of sight but as available as the aquifers under western farmlands. My father was interested in the dynamics between his mother and father. He was a psychoanalyst. It occurs to me that I was more interested, or just as interested, in shooting a bear. My father always joked that his mother had shot that bear because she thought it was her husband – was that granddad's humor? We would laugh. I'm not sure how funny this is to me right now. She was dead sixteen years before I was born. The rumor is that it was she who spoiled my father to punish my grandfather. So says my father. During the depression she would spontaneously give my father, not yet ten years old, one of the dividend checks on which she lived. This kind of excess in a time of such shortage was deemed disgraceful and drove my grandfather crazy, as it was no doubt designed to do. It is a terrible thing for a child to be used by one parent to punish the other. Myth narrates some of the circumstances in which this happens and offers a few of the reasons why a man's son is sometimes offered up to him – sometimes as a simple aggravation, sometimes as his competitor, sometimes jointed and browned in a savory stew. I came to my understanding of my grandparents' life together from the many stories my father told us, some remarks by my cousin and the few letters and documents that remain. My grandmother died in 1936. My father was eleven.

In the last days of March of 1994, when my father was sick and living suspended between life and death, his mother was the subject of which he preferred to speak until he preferred not to speak at all. Then he would, when he noticed you, simply smile. He was in considerable pain. I remember him being particularly grateful when my wife at that time, a young and pretty woman, would sit next to him. He revisited his childhood loss, not with anxiety, but with a kind of heartfelt

equanimity that was touching and utterly beautiful for us, his sons, to behold. He had an aggressive and pernicious cancer, but as long as we were able to keep him medicated, it did not seem to bother him much. He moaned when he felt pain and needed our care. But he needed less and less as the last days wore. Tolstoy explained something of my father's state of mind in *War and Peace* – I am thinking of André's death in the care of Natasha and Mari – how the concerns of the dying are slowly unknit from those of the living and yet continue to understand and honor the fact that these concerns still belong to the living.

2.6

By the time my father was the age I am now, I had pretty much forced him to approve of me. I am only vaguely able to understand that this sort of statement says more about me than him. After he was fifty, I am almost sure he was explicitly aware of the magnitude of my need for his approval even if I was not. Perhaps he was also aware of my need to force it from him? No matter, he gave in willingly and his genuine acceptance of me was his greatest gift to me. I had sought my father's approval with a relentlessness that seemed almost absurd. But once I had secured it and once he had died, the problem of living was still not solved. I found it almost surprising.

My father is dead almost nine years and the sound of his voice has begun to fade as my grandfather's voice faded. The details of his person grow vague: what he smelled like, what he looked like. I cannot reproduce most of his features to myself. There is something of a blank when I try to picture his face. But I do remember the roughness of his beard and the slightness of his hands, and sometimes I am startled by the appearance of a stranger. The face of the cashier or a man that flits across the corner of my eye seems to bear a likeness

to his face. I guess that I would recognize him if he were to appear at the door.

When the undertakers came to my house in their black American station wagon pushing their bright folding gurneys of stainless steel that opened up like music stands, they lifted his stiff, cancer-wrung corpse from the hospital bed I had installed in our back bedroom, zipped him up in their black vinyl body bag and rolled him out to the hearse parked in the drive. And then, unbelievably, even outrageously, as if nothing of moment had happened, they drove away. He had become more like firewood than father. I yearned after him down the concrete path and across the lawn. As I watched him go, I rehearsed my loss. I would never be able to call him on the phone; I would never drive out to see him in New Mexico; hear him grind out Bach's partitas on his violin; 'I would never...' reverberated. Drama. I counted the years that remained to me and for the first time measured my life from death.

I knew I had felt this kind of desperate grief before. I first discovered the inconsolable feeling of loss when I wept for my grandfather thirty-seven years earlier. Our train trip through Canada was beautiful. I remember weeping all the way from New York to Seattle and then from Seattle to New York. I wept at his funeral. But I did not weep continuously – it only seems that way and even this sense of continuity is beginning to break up. The assumption of continuity is a trick the devil likes to play. Mostly I am not self-conscious. Mostly I am not there at all. When I claim to be miserable or anxious, these harsh feelings, if I check, always fill less of the day than it feels like they do. I wander about doing this and that with virtually no thought of myself at all. The 'I' fills up far less than I suppose it does. I played on the train. I remember speaking with the other passengers, the observation car, the ruggedness of the mountains, the forests. I was having my first real taste of the same Rocky Mountains in which I would hunt as a middle-aged man.

When my father died I found that I was weeping not merely for the loss of my father because without thought, my grief spilled over into a longing for my grandfather. Quite all at once I wept for him, and so it was revealed to me at that moment that the loss of my grandfather had always been the spring box from which I had always drawn grief. Overflowing this container as well, I soon found I was weeping for my whole dead line *as if* I had known each one. I imagined each of my ancestors in his flesh. I plunged into inconsolability – each of my ancestors drying into the script that formed his name. Each one drying into a line of ink in a genealogical chart, that paper grave which keeps the unknown father in place. I imagined my own death. It occurred to me that when all of my father's sons were dead, so too must he die again. And that there would be no second burial. Those left upon the earth would not, indeed could not, commemorate *my* father. My father would have been as strange to them before as he would be after my death. And with this thought I was released into weeping for the generations, for every mother, every father lost beyond recall – each with hands harsh and gentle by turns, his or her life opening and closing like a door, flexing like the wings of an insect – butterflies in clouds over Canada, over the Great Plains dreaming of Mexico.

2.7

On a recent trip to New York, I happened to be passing through a neighborhood in which I had once lived. Of course, I knew where I was but it was still a surprise to find myself standing outside the black cast iron fence surrounding the swing and slide sets on which I had played as a child. As if bound hand and foot to the spot, I looked about shuffling thin memory until I came back to myself having realized my attention had been completely taken over by a young woman sitting on a bench. She was half reading, half looking on while her toddler

flailed about the sand box with his bucket and shovel. And there I was thinking of my own mother. I could almost remember what it felt like to be off in the world with my games and adventures, and yet still feel within the ambit of her reach. An odd sense of my own mortality washed over me and before I could adjust to the fact that the experience had already changed. Perhaps it was the smoothness of her face or the translucence of her skin, but without transition, her appearance no longer carried me to my mother but to the mother of my own children – my first wife at twenty-one or twenty-two. That woman in the park guarding her child, not much more than a girl herself, had within a single moment shown herself both as mother and lover and I desired her twice.

The adolescent is as savage as he is beautiful. Consumed by erotic desire he is always willing to burn the past to the ground for the sake of the future, for he lives at the crisis of his affections, an attachment to his mother, to the home in which he was reared, and his longing for some place and someone of his own. This crisis occurs at the nexus of a shape-change. The body that nourished becomes the body that stimulates. Like Philomela's transmogrification into the songless swallow or Tereus' sudden passage into the hoopoe, hard-beaked and wild, the adolescent does not notice his wings as much as they simply beat the air, for mother and lover are manifestly different and of different kinds. It is only nostalgia that is unable to distinguish a mother long dead from a girl who no longer exists.

2.8

Nostalgia has as little respect for memory as it has for time. My brother reported to me that during a recent stay in Trinidad, his first visit to the island in more than thirty years, as he sailed into the harbor he found himself feeling powerfully nostalgic for a time he knew perfectly well had been one of the most difficult periods of his life. I have experienced this same

phenomenon dreaming back to my days in boarding school, which seemed a prison at the time, or certain epochs belonging to each of my marriages. The clanking absurdity of desiring that which lies beyond what can be touched or in any way experienced is ridiculous enough, but that the clamoring of such longings persist fawning on memories that memory itself recalls as burdens to have lived, is a risibility too fragile to comprehend.

The women in Achilles' shelter weep for Apollo-slain Patroklos. Here the miseries of the captured women blend with the miseries of Achilles. Achilles wept for Patroklos, the women wept with him but their thoughts soon turned to their dead brothers, dead fathers, their sisters and mothers bound and led into slavery. Patroklos, whose heavy hands had taken so many lives dear to these captured women, was the agent of the women's current misery and yet he was himself the object of their nostalgia. How could grief be more bitter-sweet or binding of contrary dispositions?

Grief, in certain important ways, is always the same. It does not matter for whom I weep. Grief searches out an emptiness that is both too hard and too sweet to bear. Grief is monolithic *because* it is so indiscriminate. I have longed into the past: for comfort, for family and for the fullness and heat of the hearth. The abandon with which I have been able to give myself over to my grief astounds me. Truly the work of tears is to wash away pain. But perhaps some pain is best not relieved, or at least not too soon, not before what has been given to be understood by these tears is understood.

Nostalgia was the song the Sirens sang, a song that drew a pilot's attention into the indeterminacy of desire, of what was missing and beyond recall, of what was not, or was no longer. Nostalgia is what drew the pilot's mind from the keel that parts the foaming sea and headlong into desire – a longing for what is beautiful to eye and ear, a longing for home, and for being at home, and yet such feelings can be so thick one is unable to see the impossibility on which a man may wreck and drown.

2.9

All desiring or longing seems to be caught up in some projection of the future. Desire places what is desired before me. I look forward to it. To desire is to want what is missing – to want it someday. In this sense, nostalgia imagines the past in the future, even as it knows it is unattainable. Nostalgia is one way in which the future gets filled up with the past and in this way nostalgic longing is always, though never explicitly, a way of leaning into the future. Such a future, a future that is yet to come is bounded by death – whether I like it or not and whether I think about it or not.

Nostalgic longing seems to be irreconcilable with a certain state of mind in which I might encounter the original nature of my death. To wish for the impossible, to imagine that being at home only happens in the past, is only an idea, is to understand oneself as forever out of place. To long for the impossible is to imagine oneself as immortal. What is impossible, being with no possibility, is death. Impossible desires are as diffident as they are defiant. In nostalgia's blind disregard of death, a fantastical embrace of the impossibility of impossibility, nostalgia denies the proximate nature of death, which is to say selflessness and the nothingness from which I always seem to arise. The incompatibility between nostalgia as a looking backwards and every fearless leaning forward that belongs to the erotic, to completely engaged activity, is usually invisible.

For instance, in one version of the heroic, the possibility of death remains explicit, even as the heroic mood remains essentially nostalgic. The heroic encounter with life in its most complete moment is, like the orgiastic, a unifying experience – the self is absorbed into a kind of war-making that cares nothing for death.

The Helvetii wished to live somewhere else as they were constrained from easily carrying out war with their neighbors because of the topography of their territory. They prepared

to move for two years and in the third burned their farms and villages to the ground. They vowed to displace any who stood in the way of their migration. Like the Spartans, they submitted to poverty in exchange for strength in war. The Helvetii literally put their *longing for home* in front of them.

In this way of telling the story, these Celtic people turned the world upside down and let nostalgic longing explicitly look forward. In this way they attempted to cause the future. Nostalgia feeds the kind of courage that is a head-longing into death, the war-rage born out of a longing for relief, for return. The pagan warrior before his enemies recites the names of his forebears and works up a longing to join them in that place which looks very much like a perfected past. He works up a longing to throw himself against the hardness of battle and death, works up a desire for death from the fearlessness that belongs to having embraced the impossible. In the awful heat of war, in the oaths made under the rafters of the feasting halls, one is drawn out of the volatility of one's finitude, drawn from one's fragmented existence to become hardened into the blade by which war is waged. The sense of abandon is orgiastic as it feels overwhelmingly good to be without fear.

The heroic depends on nostalgic longing in a very strange way. It embraces the impossibility of nostalgic desire and takes this impossibility to be coincident with the impossibility of being at all. The hero lives in his war rage in a way that is without duality. The heroic explicitly embraces death as a final return but without ever noticing that nostalgic longing is not dexterous enough to tease apart the possible from the impossible or the bitter from the sweet. The fact that nostalgia sometimes looks longingly back to what was unpleasant to live may be an indication that what is at work in longing for the unobtainable past has simply not been made clear.

2.10

Consciousness dreams the world into pieces. It discovers structure without content and content without structure. To be conscious is to have taken a position, to have imagined oneself apart and separate from that which consciousness has before it. Consciousness is always self-consciousness. In the usual sense of wanting something from which one feels separated, desire belongs to consciousness. To desire gets felt as a reaching from the inside to the outside, as a need that arises to connect oneself to that which presents itself as desired. Consciousness experiences wanting in terms of what is missing. Desire presupposes lack even if it is difficult to understand how is it possible to desire that which I already have.

If consciousness were to be likened to the flickering presence of a star in the heavens, then awareness might be the blackness behind – a blackness so deep and steady as to be unfathomable in its very way to be. Awareness is like the silence manifest in the rustling of grass at dusk when the wind dies and leaves the ears yearning for the horizon. For awareness seems in some sense to be the very condition for there being anything at all. Awareness is kind or *kinding* because it is the very belonging together that is the holding together of all that is. Awareness is the sounds of traffic together with the face of a child crossing the street, the scent of spring coming through the blue of air over the flow of automobiles.

And yet for all its enormity, without a star, without the possibility of a point of view how could awareness even be? Awareness is the *wanting* of the world into being. And yet it is only when consciousness resurrects from the death of self that lack, and so desire, is born. It is only from the separation that belongs to *taking* a point of view that anything can be conceived of as missing.

So desire may not originate in lack at all. Rather it may be that desire has been delivered between the knees of an

abundance that is impossible to separate from the world at large. And to know this, to have sighted and then pronounced the unity of all things, to say, “all is one” or “god is love,” is merely to have made a noise. Such pronouncements are a sounding brass. For to be able to spell the origin of desire, to express this origin in the word ‘love’ or ‘awareness,’ cannot muffle the sound of the iron shoes that trample the heart of every living man. Knowledge of love will not save one from suffering the poverty and anguish of disappointment and loss long associated with Eros – that god whose father was rich and whose mother was poor; the god who at one moment is lounging on lavish couches, and in the next is crouched in a doorway trying to keep out of the wind and rain. Awareness is not a thing said, nor a thing done. Neither can it be over and done. Awareness belongs to, or is origin and origin seems to be nothing more or less than the incessant and mysterious human effort to enact it.

That we suffer the lack of what we desire is a fact. Not a problem. Because on certain days, Eros so overwhelms me with his always unexpected vigor that he is able to free me from my certainty, erase my knowledge of that mystery which hangs about the roots of all that is. Before the god of love I am senseless. Wounded by his arrows consciousness dies. Time fails. Those fences that kept everything from happening at once are suddenly allowed to fall. On such days I might walk by a park in which I once played as a child and find myself at every age. For as I walked away from those black iron pickets, I desired them all: my mother when I was a child, my girlfriend in high school, my young wife, the mother of my sons. For I had fallen in love with that perfect stranger in whose radiant fecundity the world was brought into being again, and for the first time.

Yes, ‘again and for the first time,’ for *déjà vu* marks the presence of the god as surely as gray heaven accompanies the rain. *Love’s not time’s fool*, for love unhinges time. One is always in love again and for the first time. And yet the failure

of desire to obey either the laws of decency or physics disquiets me. Zeus carried off Europa and put an end to her childhood. Theseus raped Helen as a girl of ten or twelve. And I? What is it that I want to do?

Even as erotic longing begins to dissolve the space between us, I have begun to dream about the future in terms of satisfaction. Even under the sway of what is beautiful, I keep remembering myself. But when I am without a place, when I am in that moment that neither begins nor ends, I am as the wind singing in the rigging – at home everywhere.

Nostalgia longs not only for the ghost of what is no longer possible, what has been safely hidden in time, but something else as well. What this might be I cannot quite grasp. Perhaps it is something forgotten, something that cannot be taken or seen from any point of view – a far richer temporality than any imagination can dream.

And so touched by desire's needs and losses, it is right that when I catch sight of myself, a man falling away from his prime in love with a girl given to another, that I should grieve for all that has passed through my hands – and yet in love with her as I am it seems at once that I have not desired her too much, but too little. For fundamentally to desire enough is to consume every disappointment and undo the very possibility of stupidity. To encounter Eros is to soften into the impossibility of that moment which neither begins nor ends, and in so doing abandon every hope and lean into the future without fear. To be without hope is to be as fearless as only someone in love can be. To be in love is to dive headlong into the rapture of the obvious – that everything is as it should be.

2.11

Neither comfort nor discomfort led Socrates' actions, unless desiring virtue is a comfort or a discomfort. He prepared for his death as casually as if he were getting ready for a nap,

making no concession to his impending execution until the hemlock had numbed him to his stomach and his heart began to grow cold. Only then did Socrates bring the conversation to a close and shut his eyes.

Socrates had been debating with friends on his last day, as he would have on any other day. The topic under discussion was apropos as usual: is there or is there not an afterlife? And as was usual, the topic was a question. But no sooner had Socrates closed his eyes in readiness for death, than he opened them up. Asklepios. It was the custom to sacrifice to Asklepios when a person was cured of his ailment. Would Crito be so kind as to sacrifice a cock to Asklepios for him? Why did Socrates remember this courtesy just as death was sweeping over him? Did he feel relief? Is it a relief to have his life's burdens taken away? Could it be that a good man is not afraid to die because living well is so exhausting – like the running of a long and exhilarating race? How much energy does it take to keep the world open with a question? The last act of a man condemned for impiety should be an act of piety. He must thank the god for the medicine that was finally to cure him of life. Irony is almost an aggravation.

A friend is speaking to you on the phone and the next day his wife calls and says through her tears choked-back and flowing that your friend is dead. That is how death comes. My father died. But when I left the room and walked into my own living room, what difference did his death make to me? Had I not seen his dead body, perhaps I might have thought that he was still alive in the back bedroom or, better, alive and well in New Mexico writing poems and playing tennis. But at five o'clock in the morning on April 6, 1994, God forgave him. Why was I inconsolable? My father stopped breathing, my grandfather toppled down a set of stairs, my mother went to sleep and did not wake up.

Other witnesses to Socrates' death have reported that as the jailer mixed the hemlock, Socrates was busy learning to

play a new tune on the flute. Socrates did not seem to suffer much from fear. The question was his secret. What is certain is what is most questionable. Because he understood so much, he could not know anything. It was his business to question whatever presented itself as knowledge. What is the anxiety concerning gain or loss to one who *believes* he knows nothing? For one who *really* knows nothing, the process of the world yields *only* gain and loss. It is not possible to decide which of the two is better. His inability to know virtue seems to have its most profound consequence with respect to manifestly evil acts; is not Satan even in his rebellion against heaven condemned to continue to do the work of the Lord?

Yes. Socrates knew nothing at all, and it was because he was manifestly familiar with things and how they happened. He had an understanding of the world in abundance. Socrates' so-called skepticism was not so radical as to stifle all action. Doubt is, after all, transparent to *belief*. Understanding is not so much what is known as what is demonstrated in activity. To understand something in the sense I am using the term here does not mean to know something in the sense of having possession of some trans-temporal proposition. Rather to understand indicates a posture and an inclination to *stand under* or stand in obedience to how something goes. Understanding: a line of troops *stand* obediently *under* their commander. In German, *vorstanden* these troops *stand before* their commander. Real understanding obtains in toiling with the familiar. In living, I become familiar with my environment. My environment is that to which I may be subject or with which I may unify. So when I really understand, there is no doubt, and so to say that I am obedient to my understanding, is to be descriptive and not proscriptive. I am obedient to how it goes for me, and not to my idea about how it should go.

But the transparency of doubt is a flickering thing. Knowledge, in its desire to master that over which it presides, moves away uncertainty by denying change and so moving in a direction

different from that of familiarity. Familiarity is, and so is manifest in my obedience to the process of the world, which it understands. Understanding is not the subject of epistemology and knowledge in its efforts to transcend change is always skeptical.

When Socrates said that he did not know, he meant that he was unable to confirm his most trusted beliefs. He was unable to confirm the relationship between his ideas about the world and his experience of that same world. It is between ideation and engaged experience that wonder takes its nourishment. To believe and not to know is to wonder.

Before the transcendental was posited (perhaps this was a time that never was), nothing was known. There was no problem of knowledge but only understanding and its obedience. When Plato's Socrates conceived the possibility that the idea of a particular entity, its *eidōs* – the look of it – might be the fixed point of reality in a cosmos manifestly and disturbingly in flux, a new problem appeared: the problem of knowledge. Entities were given by the idea of them. Ideas, which are seemingly not in time, cannot be directly experienced, they cannot even be mine, and so it was not clear how the Forms of the sensible entities could be known. Plato told such stories and epistemology was born.

Because Plato's dialogues are so disrupted by irony, I am unable to discern the strength of Socrates' grip upon belief: how tightly or how loosely he held to his beliefs. Moreover, I cannot tell if this failing of mine is a problem in Plato or with me? Does Platonic irony obtain for me, in place of questions because I have always *known* too much? I have too compiled a list of those things whose loss *I know* I could not endure or whose possession *I know* is beyond my reach? To be afraid requires that I *know* what is to come, and that I *believe*, more or less, in what I know. To understand is to lean forward without fear. It is to manifest human temporality in its wholeness, ignoring the shards of its ideation: the past, the present and the future.

2.12

Not only does grief seem to have fingers too thick to unknot the tangle of my relations to the past, but also the oceanic sense of nostalgic grief that sometimes overwhelms me feels a little bit *too good* to be true. Such bittersweet longings seem as promiscuous as the aesthetic experience. I read a novel and, still weeping, pick up another. Nostalgia can be felt as a kind of grief: a pain for home and a time that is no more, a longing for an impossible return, a longing that properly belongs to defeat. But am I able actually to experience the impossibility of return when I am awash in longing for what I seem to think is impossible? Is defeat ever possible when I am caught in the grip of the nostalgic as strong and as blind as Polyphemus upon the mountains of his home raging at *no one* for punishing his one-eyed lack of hospitality?

It seems beyond doubt that the reasons I hunt are shot through with nostalgia. But nostalgia was not what began my consideration of hunting. I did not begin to consider or describe my relationship to my grandfather because I felt nostalgic for him. The mood that first caught my attention was almost the opposite of nostalgic longing. What began my thoughts about hunting and the quality of my relations to the past was finding myself caught up in an odd and uncanny repetition. I emerged from my involvement with oranges and knives in the kitchen in San Pedro and quite innocently found myself enacting a distant but familiar memory of a grandfather. I remembered him by being him. What was both familiar and strange about the incident was that I found him to be who I was, and the past went right on changing under my feet.