

The litter was multiplying, as the droplets of crude oil that held together the composite parts of the orphan's woollen earwig disintegrated in the dirty water. Patrick lunged forward, to grab the litter before it sank irretrievably from sight, but his wings, torn and sodden, were buried in silt. The last of the litter disappeared from Patrick's view, and with that the sole condition of its passing to its proper place. Worse, with the loss of the litter's visibility came the jeopardy of the safe management, indeed of the proper burial, of the irreversible exclusion from the space that he occupied, of the vastly *invisible* – the jeopardy of Patrick's ocular displacement of psychic control. For this litter, sunken out of sight, was now the invisible's exhumation, its terrifying and untraceable entry into and scurrying across a space that was the same as his own.

Panicking Patrick had to get out. He would trust the silt as his makeshift bin, an emergency relief force of unaffordable expense. He would gift to the silt his lavender wings, the shrewd offering of a prosecuted sycophant. Out of court, enzymes dissolved his middle lamellas, his thorax cut from his wings, and as his abdomen floated upwards, he edged forwards, riverwards, to wider springs. He passed beneath the gallery. He would escape litter. He squeezed the scales of his submerged back. *He brushed an arc of waxed yarn...* Seized by terror, Patrick knew at once that what had touched him was the antenna of the sunken woollen insect. It was there. Sunken. Squirring. Everywhere in the deep, lightless river's sludge: the extended invisible space, his overturned psychic space, swarming with flashing projections of former lustre. Sunken, squirming, the litter *was* the river. It spread across it. It navigated it perfectly. It sensed his every move. It carried and rocked him. He was panicking. He stretched backwards. He packed his cracked porcelain. He paddled abstractly, plucking wilted grapes. He projected municipal lines onto the sky, desperate attempts to reverse the collapse of light-retinal breaks into memory banks, to save his brain with fortified recycling panicking stacks. But the woollen earwig was there too: the sky was crawling with it. And into its black depths the litter pulled every

cloud, gallery and peering face, and popped them back out, polished with litterine glare. And all of it sank into the river, crushing Patrick into the silt. The sun, utterly indifferent, turning away, jolted madly, from gallery to gravel terrace, collapsing day into night after day into night, collapsing his only resource, his short, suffered life, his small diamond mirror of litter, light, space and psyche. A constellation without stars. He had reached the end of his lifecycle. It was Autumn.

The landscape drew its former minors. The new low sun steadied behind a former cloud. Estates and umbel silhouettes slipped like dawn feathers beneath verisome views. Numbers, prostrate among monocots, blankets, the last of the of rotting loads. Bronze bracken, split dye, the groves' unpopulated edges, grounding appliances in taciturn mounds, stiles. Notices, residual hedgerows, the successful cartilage of lice. Small pieces of metal, plaster matted and cracked over air gaps, sullen semi-evergreens. String netting, caught on parsed branches of elm trees, with lead silhouettes of birds, with silhouetted signs, abandoned paintings, and leaf fall curling on compacted ground. Anything, in this surrendered light, in this immeasurable isolation, with its own dull and palatable lustre, its own invisible litterine glow. Anything its own litter and litter to another, distorted by an older dream-work, shrouded by an Autumn sepia mist. Patrick's corpse, wingless, drifted downriver.

But just as this landscape of litter precluded the installation of bins, just as it levelled their Parmenidean logic into its groundless nominations, its arbitrary enthusiasms, its infinite undulation of litter's crushed husk, so too this sudden surge of autumn-death precluded death's giving over. For litter's primacy and ubiquity had been established at the first attempt by Honourable Commissioners to pick it up, while death had been incorporated into life as soon as life, born as Patrick was born at the foot of an English escarpment, concentrated only on its own improvement. Disdain pleads for litter. It

constructs its waste management systems only to destroy them. It completes itself only when it irredeemably fails. Death had been incorporated into Patrick as he shunned it, propping him up throughout his life with its proxy form. And now, the same corpse lived on, preserved. Hence Patrick drifted, embalmed in grime and silt, now stirring with a lighter disdain.

Indeed, it was as if Patrick's project, to cut the river across the entire circumference of the globe, had all along been the project of the river itself in secret collusion with his corpse. The river was litter and disdain incarnate: as each item of the landscape withdrew into its own dead and undying isolation, the river could accelerate towards its own dead and undying end, undisturbed by children and toys, while begetting litter as everything beyond its straightened banks, and dragging it all into itself as their universal metaphor, like tiles slipping onto scrubland off a pregnant skip. As for Patrick, well, he was free. Free from memory and guilt, drifting calmly through an infinitely benign and recurring dream, like a crinkled photographic film registering simultaneously the movement of the river's flow and the sun's rays against the tilted earth.

After many nights, the morning sun had risen not over Patrick's hind legs, but to his side. The river was not yet straight. It was flowing south-east, on a stretch that comprised the near side of an enormous meander. But the river's correction of its course, its undoing of its meander, was already underway. Patrick and the river's items were drifting at an angle acute from that of the river's sides. Thousands of vindictive particles, raised in erosive array, braced to be repeatedly and relentlessly driven into the near bank of the meander. Braced to accelerate. Braced to chip a bit of rock off the river cliff. Braced to drive water onto providential water in a roaring, victorious gush. A recumbent bell rushed past Patrick, buoyant for the loss of its tongue, a silent portent for the meander's desolation. Its rim slashed against the exposed clay. Then its leather handle and a tuft of uprooted grass did the same, tearing at vulnerable grains. Then crumbled mortar, wrapped in silk from unadaptable outhouses, hollow

stems of spurious perennials, glass and iron frames with small hinged doors that once housed and magnified oil lamps, too gathered in the river's steadfast current. Basins, split panes, tap roots, turned wooden pieces stained with gratuitous turquoise and countless glass jars muted by river weeds. Terminal clusters of bright orange berries, authenticated specifying documents, adventitious stems, keratin feathers and cold stones, crustacean shells, ground elder, corms, glazed ceramics with departed infections, sweet chestnut burrs and aerial roots, as the force of the river's surge increased. Scuffed gate wood, hessian sacks, premature sallow buds, tilled clods and stalled metabolisms, driving relentlessly against the meander wall. And then, a towering wave of water as meander after meander gave way upriver, growing larger and larger as its foaming crest piled every object that had clung to the river's miserable basin: shank wool, brambles, flying shuttles, small wet clothes, tenterhooks, torn manes and gutters; mill bricks, scoured thread, swift rollers, basket cylinders, cables, red hair and canal banks; hags, snapped beams, intoxicants, the novelist's manuscript and the folded child, all unwritten and recast as litter incarnate, surging with the cumulative force of a country in decline, raising Patrick onto its face and crashing against the last stand of the meander wall. Soil ripped from soil from the last of flailing, flaccid roots. Exposed fixings of dismembered infrastructure beat against the composite floor. Metal and glass grazed wood, clay fragmented, vegetation rubbed and snapped, the remains of sensory organs were pulped in the muffled cacophony of dark water; everything was expressed in its mode of attrition. The bell rang with silt in the furious water. Distinction was withdrawn. Advanced technologies renounced the future as they rammed against their predecessors in an utterly useless bric-a-brac of right angle joints and segments of wheels. Patrick spun violently, as the mass of dead litter rolled in directionless turbulence. Atoms, strutted suddenly with a strange sense of privation, tremored in this final and original expenditure of energy, and burst in a violent prising of narrative time from their stuffed

repose into irrecordably shrinking flurries of quantum energy in a sudden regression of matter to its most primordial state.

And through and beyond Patrick the water would rush. Its force would be unstoppable. It would charge over and beyond the petty horizon to dredge its planetary trench, breaking meander after meander, rallying oceans littered with whales and coral, drowning cities fatigued by war and rinsing images of seasonless shade. It would carve its trench deeper and deeper into the earth's crust, sculpting the planet into one continuous spherical valley, its ridges as single points on a spinning-top hourglass packed with rock. Its undying circularity would be complete, just as every diffuse and unnameable object racing along the river or rolling softly on its silty bed would never be used up or decompose.

However, as the river rushed on, water that had been passing along the outer edge of the meander at the moment of the bursting of its bank had found itself suddenly cut off from the river's flow. Motionless, this water deposited its miscellaneous objects, which still resembled their former use, and still registered, therefore, as litter. The river's new banks closed, and what remained of the meander's curve was enclosed in the shape of an arched pond, annexed to the river but unable to slip into it: the undying river's double, *the corpse's corpse*. Who could have foreseen this omission? This water without course? This leather bow in a desert of former pasture? This litter's litter? Protruding from the sand, a mote among grains; its own incompleteness a cog in the river's wheel, the river that would pass it indefinitely, the river that had cut it off. A spasm, a strangled meander, in the U-turn of cosmic time. The return of repression itself. The persistence of the litter's glare like the daily rising of the sun.

There on the bank of the ox-bow lake lay Patrick, overturned, shorn of an abdomen, torn from legs, silt tears rolling from his gouged sockets. And above him, *thousands and thousands of woollen litter insects*, fashioned in the cosmic

tumult of the river's straightening, the great reconfiguration of matter, out of dormant plants, industrial machinery, parent rock and frayed yarn. Compound eyes made from chipped steel, mouth parts from the congealed adhesive, legs from reinforced straw, heads, thorax and abdomens from wool fullered into coal ash, wings dug out of the silt. They flew, crawled and swam, indifferent to the cold nights, darting at Patrick's corpse.

Disdain, poor Patrick, wept disdain.