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Mark Young

# **Closed Environment**

**By Mark Young**

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## A NOTE ON THE MANDRAKE

The irregular  
black bands down  
its side allow a  
small force to over-  
come a larger  
one. Otherwise  
it is blue, &  
draws caricatures  
of the effects of  
technology  
on a modern society  
where the houses  
& temples are made  
from hardened  
steel. They are  
still intact, a  
modicum of the  
*Machtpolitik* of its  
massage, although  
the latter is ex-  
pressed as a ratio  
of load to effort  
& its form rarely  
avers its content.

## THE YUCATAN PENINSULA AUTONOMOUS REGION

In order to abide  
by the precepts  
of *The Loneliness of  
the Long Distance  
Runner* which is / their  
holy book, some moths  
retire from politics  
but still continue to  
produce distinctive fibers  
based on the use of  
quartz & similar poly-  
morphs. Others are  
rounded up so they  
do not become a  
significant number  
when their final digit  
is rounded down. The  
rest, once sufficient  
radiation has been  
absorbed, are left  
to complete the  
frescoes on the walls  
of the Sistine Chapel.  
As members of the  
company of the faithful  
this is part of their  
duty, a way to ensure  
the Yucatan remains  
a one-party state.

## CLOSED ENVIRONMENT

aug  
mented

black &  
white movies  
that color  
the mind

songs  
sung of

Saint-Saëns'  
macabre dancers  
animal carni  
vals

Once a month, in early spring once a week, he would drive up to the mountains, then walk for about thirty minutes to a small creek he had discovered. There he would pick watercress & dandelion leaves, wild strawberries in the spring. The dandelion leaves he turned into wine, the watercress he added to his sandwiches & salads. In late evening, in early spring, he would sit on the small balcony of his 37<sup>th</sup> floor studio apartment eating the strawberries, looking out across towards the mountains, bridging the gap between.

thought  
étude

\*

étude  
iously

he worked  
knight after  
knight on ways  
to destroy the  
temple of  
the policiers

but was dis  
poemed by  
the tracts he  
read during  
the day

"Have you a gold cup...?"

san greal  
sang real

holistic  
ally

\*

holistically

he was unable  
to conceive

that the concept of the particle accelerator  
he was working on to destroy the palace  
of the templars would eventually

become the template for another temple

forgot that  
pure science  
begets im-  
purities when  
applied

(the  
catapults &  
burning  
mirrors of  
Archimedes)

forgot the  
unforeseen con-  
sequences  
as he re-  
played the  
foreseen  
sequences in  
the games of  
Capablanca

beneath a  
poster  
of Dali's  
burning  
giraffes

\*

giraffes  
eat the  
higher  
leaves  
of the  
McArbres

im  
part



ial  
to any  
part  
of the trunk  
below

animated  
animists  
practising  
self-love

leaving the  
ground  
cover for  
et in arcadia ego  
romantics &  
other past  
oral  
lists

leaving  
the temple  
empty the  
songs  
un-

aug  
mented

## MILITARY MANEUVERS

No ice on the water, not  
yet cold enough for that.  
So, perhaps it's CGI, or a  
rolled-out simulacrum,  
blue-tinged, as if the light

is reflecting off something  
solid. The animals crossed  
first, horses & ostriches, then  
the tanks & troop carriers.  
Scribes recorded the pass-

ages of passage, read back  
what they had written, &  
then they crossed as well.  
Providing a verbal sense of  
armies on the move, but

with little seismic evidence.  
Later, as night fell, an old  
man in a dog cart full of  
kindling forded the stream.  
It was then the earth shook.

## THE ORIGINS OF FORM

Fish school when the moon  
is out. Before. Separate. At

various levels with disparate  
meanings. States of grace.

Waiting for the cast of light  
across the surface of the

water. On appearance drawn  
to it. Coalesce, luminescent. In

the fine mesh of the right net  
they might become a poem.

All / those who / come as guests

In Antwerp he asks the truck drivers  
but in vain. The day starts fading  
& they, without being trapped by  
retrospective, exert no influence upon  
judgments of distance. He walks away

from them. All totalitarian dystopias,  
in life & in art, seem to be obsessed  
with the everyday crimes of the  
middle classes. The Texas Chain-  
saw Massacre keeps looping in

his mind. Incongruous in it is  
the figure of Beatrice as Dante saw her,  
in shadows, lighting them, diffusing  
them, her hand raised, frozen. In time  
the opacities may affect his vision.

## THE OX-BOW INCIDENT

Heavy floods. Build-up of silt. Eventually the meander is almost separated from the river's main flow. Only the owl's head moves. Mangroves grow. Their spores are haploid. Originally sent to Egypt to fight the French they were eventually converted into a porcelain factory to supplement the warm wet winters as a means of providing warmth for incubation. So much violence. The fission of uranium was inadvertently achieved & the resultant pollution brought hot dry summers. Non-motile, the ova were fished to the verge of extinction. "They're deader than a Piute's grave," said the local undertaker just before the fallout metamorphosed him into a gametophyte.

## LATER

The root here is "dote;" which, based on an older version of Adobe's now-defunct Flash Player, means "to show affection." That's an empirical overview – further analysis, whose political purpose is to imagine the kind of interruption & disturbance Taylor Swift & James Taylor singing, say, *Falling in Love with Love* on a prime-time variety TV show might do to the economy, reveals a series of corrections. How we look now is not how we have always traveled.

## À PROPOS OF A HICKORY WALKING STICK

*Un bâton de marche, 1-O-Kind-Orig, noir*, grown in the Ozarks, has already provided us plenty of greens & radishes a bit ahead of schedule due to the heat & a wet spring. Plus, the flooding of 1993 had a lot to do with the failure of the falafel mix. Thought to have started with the 1991 eruption of Mt. Pinatubo in Luzon in The Philippines. Now caskets float down the Missouri washed loose from a cemetery, engineered defenses collapse; & even though the Swiss cheese model of accident causation posits that failure cannot be traced back to a single root cause, & fallibility is an inescapable part of the human condition, we still search Ebay for a sturdy hickory stick to go out & beat some convenient heads with.

## THE MANUMITTED SLAVES

Although scientifically unproven, pumping the piano was once supposed to lead to levitation. "Whole lotta shakin' going on," sang the man who married his barely

post-pubescent cousin. For a time it was a popular refrain, especially to those industrial & commercial classes who took it as an anthem in their struggle against the power of the mon-

archy. Then, like they, it fell out of favor when the Vorticists showed that since its effort lay closer to the fulcrum than to the load, there's no way it could be made to crack nuts.



## GALAPAGOS

Thunder somewhere. Again  
the moths. Light bends in a  
severe curve to show me  
where I've been, not where  
I'm going. *Star Trek* re-runs  
taping upstairs, L. in Mel-  
bourne, the cat having to be  
shown the meat in her bowl

before she starts eating it once  
more. Like me she's growing  
old, too foolish to come in out  
of the heat, out of a humidity so  
thick my cigarette smoke needs  
claws to fight its way through.

## A LEOPARD LEFT OVERNIGHT

This rug is one-of-a-kind,  
reminiscent of juicy grape-  
fruit or freshly brewed  
Ceylon tea. Has undergone  
a rigorous selection process  
which, although not valid

on its own, can still replace  
a scientific approach to ta-  
lent identification. Dealers  
in diamonds & breeders of  
German Shepherds swear  
by it; though there is still

much discussion as to whet-  
her the ancillary behavioral  
interviews should have been  
left unstructured in order to  
provide outcomes of more  
honesty & greater insight.

## TRAIN I RIDE

I am watching a YouTube video of a train pulling a load of zinc ore on its 750 kilometer journey to the refinery in Townsville, about 100 kilometers north of where we live.

This is no 16-coaches-long-Elvis-Presley number. Think 70 or so wagons, think each one maybe fifteen meters long. The calculating part of the mind goes dizzy trying to work out the metrics of it – total weight carried, total length.

The side panel of YouTube offers me, as alternative, Opening The Coffin Of King Henry VIII, or 80 Incredible Moments Caught On Camera, or Windy Day At The Beach, or David Bowie's Heroes. All Words In The Title In Capitals, all videos with no relevance to the train pushing on to the refinery.

I leave the train line a few minutes in & open the coffin of KHVIII. Or, more accurately, I am confronted with his six wives chronologically introduced, followed by Kings Charles I & II. Here there is no drone footage, just a commentator droning on. & it's not the coffin about to be opened but the vault. & because the vault has already been opened to put the headless corpse of Charles I in alongside Henry VIII, plus, probably, opened before that to make sure there was room for a second coffin & opened after to ensure that all proprieties had been observed, the video is something of a anticlimax.

So I return to the zinc. & YouTube, offended by my lack of interest in early 16<sup>th</sup> century English history, offers up in the side panel Marvel & Star Wars comix – much of it fan-made but posing as the real thing – interspersed with short pieces about the Rugby World Cup.

Now I am offended. I prefer the real thing – if 'real thing' is an appropriate term to describe something that is patently not real; & 80-second shorts reveal nothing of the 80-minute struggle that often characterizes the game I've loved for nearly 80 years.

The train moves on, past travelers' rest areas & cattle stations, running parallel to the highway. My earlier thoughts catch up with me: the pedant in me rises to the surface; I open another browser window. Search for wagon dimensions: 15.5 meters. 71 wagons comes in at roughly 1.1 kilometers. Plus the two engines. Carrying load per wagon: 72 tonnes. Total load of ore: 5110 tonnes.

Now we're moving through Calcium – Yes, Virginia, there is a place called Calcium, & guess what they mined there. Time for an interlude. Heroes is again in the side panel, this time a version by King Crimson, also shot live in Berlin like Bowie's was. & another continuity – the guitarist is Robert Fripp, who played an integral part in the original Bowie recording.

Back to the train for its last minute / forty kilometers to reach Townsville. Maybe it's the impending presence of a city, but the sidebar fills up with AI-generated jailbait. I switch to full screen, uncomfortable with such companions. & as a convoy of cars towing caravans passes over a bridge while the train passes beneath it, & the beginning of the built-up area draws closer, I close off with my own rendition of Heroes, dipping my toe into those waters where the dolphins swim.

## THE KINETICS OF LOW-FLYING AIRCRAFT

In crystal lettuces the  
molecules vibrate round  
fixed positions. Solid  
state theory. Strength,  
not subtlety. One more

garage band, at their  
best when singing  
their own songs especially  
when the geometry  
of the combustion chamber

is redesigned. Unable  
to afford expensive sound-  
gear. Instead make use  
of an inflated vocal sac  
which may exceed the

rest of the body in size  
& drowns out all the  
other frontline states  
who still haven't come  
to terms with universal

suffrage. In winter rises  
above the cold, sends  
food stamps floating down  
into the eclectic air  
of subsidized theater.

for Denise Levertov

                  some  
of the time

the line  
goes taut  
o-  
illogical

& I am  
beaten to  
the body

left only with  
a grab-bag  
full

of glassy-  
eyed

head-  
lines

"...the last day the sharks appeared."

Mark Young was born in Aotearoa / New Zealand but now lives in a small town in North Queensland in Australia. He has been publishing poetry for over sixty years, & is the author of around seventy-five books, primarily text poetry but also including speculative fiction, vispo, non-fiction, & art history. His most recent books are One Hundred Titles From Tom Beckett, with paintings by Thomas Fink, published by Otoliths in June, 2024; Alkaline Pageantry, published by Serious Publications in September, 2024; The Magritte Poems, published by Sandy Press in October, 2024; the downloadable pdf, The Hit List, published by Scud Editions in February, 2025; & due for publication, The Complete Post Person Poems from Sandy Press, & Some Unrecorded Voyages of Vasco da Gama from Otoliths.