SPONTANEOUS PARTICULARS
THE TELEPATHY OF ARCHIVES

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CHRISTINE BURGIN
NEW DIRECTIONS
“Faith!” shouted Goodman Brown, in a voice of agony and desperation; and the echoes of the forest mocked him, crying, 'Faith! Faith!' as if bewildered wretches were seeking her, all through the wilderness."

Nathaniel Hawthorne: "Young Goodman Brown" (1835).

Previous work I have done in terms of manuscripts and archives led me to the massive collection of the papers of the 18th-century New England theologian—some say our first American philosopher—Jonathan Edwards, in New Haven at Yale's Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, one of the largest buildings in the world devoted entirely to rare books and manuscripts. The Beinecke was constructed from Vermont marble and granite, bronze and glass, during the early 1960s. The structure displays and contains acquisitive violence, the rapacious "fetching" involved in collecting, and, on the other hand, it radiates a sense of peace. Downstairs, in the Modernist reading room I hear the purr of the air filtration system, the rippling sound of pages turning, singular out of tune melodies of computers re-booting. Scholars are seated at wide worktables bent in devotion over some particular material object. They could be copying out a manuscript or deciphering a pattern. Here is deep memory's lure, and sheltering. In this room I experience enduring relations and connections between what was and what is.
I remember the summer before my sister Jerusha's death.

and I was leaning over the soutn ence and thinking in this manner, that I was never likely to do better and where should I go etc.

The Beinecke's vast collection of Edwards family memorabilia contains letters, diaries, notebooks, essays, and more than twelve hundred sermons (most of them in miniscule script). Jonathan Edwards was the only son among ten unusually tall sisters their minister father jokingly referred to as his "sixty feet of daughters." Their mother, Esther Stoddard Edwards, also known for her height, taught her eleven children and others in their Northampton farmhouse. Later they received the same education their father provided to local boys in his parish in East Windsor, Connecticut. The girls were tutored along with their brother (and in some cases they tutored him) in theology, philosophy, Latin, Greek, Hebrew, history, grammar and mathematics. They attended finishing school in Boston. But almost all that remains from this 18th-century family's impressive tradition of female learning are a bedsheet probably woven by Jonathan's mother, a tiny blue fragment of his wife Sarah Pierrepont Edwards' wedding dress, a journal kept by Esther Edwards Burr (their oldest daughter) and several raggedy scraps from his younger sister Hannah's private writings—

The folio-size double leaves that Jonathan, Sarah, and his ten tall sisters wrote on were often homemade: hand-stitched from linen rags salvaged from worn out clothing or sometimes on scraps left over from dress patterns. Lists, sermons, quotations of psalms, dissonant scripture clusters, are pressed between coarse cardboard covers with frayed edges. The rag paper color has grown deeper and richer in some.
all the organs consisting of little threads; or nerves: by the way as frequently happiness
some parenthesis which darkens the sense

Harmony continues to exist through fact and experience—though there is no reason why it should—nor is there any proof you can read back to the notion of one mind's inner relation with nature's vibratory hum. Lyric poets can't move heaven and earth in order to say things, language separates from music through yearning muted rhythmic pulse—through stepwise voice motion—

Haughtiness is always little violence

Three of Edwards’ manuscript books I particularly love are titled Efficacious Grace. Two of them he constructed from discarded semi-circular pieces of silk paper his wife and daughters used for making fans. If you open these small oval volumes and just look—without trying to decipher the minister’s spidery script, pen strokes begin to resemble textile thread-text. Surface and meaning co-operate to keep alive in one process mastery in service, service in mastery.
Sheer verbal artistry can be a force for mercy. I have always been drawn to Edwards, even his fire-eating sermons where each judging word has its own particular cell. Especially the notorious “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God: A Sermon Preached at Enfield, July 8th, 1741, at a Time of Great Awakenings” with its chilling epigraph from Deuteronomy 32, “Their Foot shall slide in due time,” because he understands the way in which single words and sentence clusters directly effect involuntary memory. Involuntary memory is lucid, pre-verbal, soothing.

Hit or miss—an arrow into the eye of loving.
One day, by chance, I opened a folder titled: Wetmore, Hannah Edwards, Diary: in the hand of her daughter Lucy Wetmore Whittlesey. Inside was a copy of "the private writings" of Jonathan's sister. Lucy's late 18th-century italic script (easier to read than her uncle's or her mother's earlier handwriting) begins in media res with an excerpt from Psalm 55.6.

“Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest.”

The visual and acoustic shock of that first exclamatory "Oh" on paper brown with oxidation, made me think in a rush of Henry James' great novel The Wings of the Dove (1902) and the beauty of the King James version of Psalm 55 in relation to its wide use in this novel where James so perfectly finds his form for the work that follows after. The fictional orphaned American heiress Milly Theale, "stricken and doomed, condemned to die under short respite, while also enamoured of the world," is based on James' American cousin Minny (Mary) Temple, whose early death from tuberculosis in March 1870 (she was twenty-four, he was twenty-six) he feeds on as an artist.
In 1914, at the end of his long writing career, James closed the second volume of his memoirs Notes of a Son and Brother (William died in 1910) with a chapter built around extracts from letters Minny had written to their mutual friend, John Chipman Gray, by then a distinguished professor at the Harvard Law School and the author of two influential treatises, “Restraints on the Alienation of Property” (1883) and “The Rule against Perpetuities” (1886).

Gray’s side of the correspondence with Minny has been lost, but he saved hers until shortly before his own death when, anxious they would be lost, he brought them to William’s widow. She suggested they be sent to Henry, who was gathering material for Notes. Before sending Minny’s correspondence across the ocean, Alice and her daughter Mary Margaret carefully transcribed the originals in longhand. At some point these copies were deposited in four folders at Houghton Library where Alfred Habegger discovered them during the 1980s.

Chapter XIII of Notes ends with this paragraph: “Death, at the last, was dreadful to her; she would have given anything to live—and the image of this, which was long to remain with me, appeared so of the essence of tragedy that I was in the far-off aftertime to seek to lay the ghost by wrapping it, a particular occasion aiding, in the beauty and dignity of art. . . . Much as this cherished companion’s presence among us had represented for William and myself—and it is on his behalf I especially speak—her death made a mark that must stand here for a too waiting conclusion. We felt it together as the end of our youth.”

Psalm 68: “The wings of a dove covered with silver, its pinions of fine gold.”

James heavily doctored the originals Gray had provided. (According to Habegger “there was scarcely a sentence he did not emend.”) Then he destroyed them. He also left out the extraordinary letters she sent both to himself and to William—the brother he said he was speaking for.

M. Temple—present as absent—the imaginary friend known to be imaginary but impossible to let go. Her initials play their part as reflectors in The Wings of the Dove. Five years later in “The Question of our Speech,” an address to the graduating class at Bryn Mawr College, Henry James told the assembled audience: “All our employment of constituted sounds, syllables, sentences, comes back to the way we say a thing, and it is very largely by saying, all the while, that we live and play our parts.” Then how do I pronounce the last name of his fictive “figure in the gilded coach as it comes forth”?

A teal is a small wild fresh-water fowl. Its flesh is food for hunters. But James has seeded the word with the spectral grapheme h and the plant, “wrapped in the dignity of art,” has grown so that when I read T h e a l e on the page and say it aloud to myself, this aspirate puff of breath co-implicates his fictional birdwoman with wealth, theatricality and death.
“Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies”—The ale reflects the orthography of John Keats' “Ode to a Nightingale” where frequent digraphs ea and th flourish as letter-spirits. “I have been half in love with easeful Death, / Call'd him soft names in many a musèd rhyme, / To take into the air my quiet breath.”

When I read Minny Temple's letters so artfully arranged to form the climax of Notes of a Son and Brother, the last letters of the orphan poet—also "stricken and doomed, condemned to die under short respite"—serve as images or shadows.

“Up from the mystic play of shadows,” Walt Whitman, walking along Long Island’s north shore at Paumanok, listens to a migratory sea-bird pouring forth meanings in measureless measures.

“Where to answering, the sea,
Delaying not, hurrying not
Whisper’d me through the night, and very plainly
before daybreak,
Lisp’d to me the low and delicious word death,
And again death, death, death, death”

The ale leads to the limit of breath. The grapheme h, breath’s last letter remnant, hangs suspended somewhere in ether like an Absalom by his hair.

Alice James' copy of the last letter Minny wrote to Gray on February 16, 1870—she died on March 8th—ends this way: “I feel the greatest longing for summer, or spring. I think I would like it to be always spring for the rest of my life, & and to have all the people I care for always with me, & never speak of going away—but who wouldn’t like it so? Good-bye—write soon. I hope you are successful with your lectures. I should like to hear you give them. Are respectable spinsters allowed?

"Always affectly yrs,
“Mary Temple"
In 1905, two years after finishing *The Wings of the Dove*, James returned to America after a twenty year absence. Recalling his visit in *The American Scene* (1906) in a section titled "Cambridge and Harvard," he described catching sight of Gray: "I went into the new Law Library, immense and supreme—in the shadow of which I caught myself sniffing the very dust, pre-historic but still pungent, of the old. I saw in the distance a distinguished friend, all alone, belatedly working there, but to go to him I should have had to cross the bridge that spans the gulf of time, and, with a suspicion of weak places, I was nervous about its bearing me."

*Wisdom of Solomon* V.11. "Or as when a bird hath flown through the air, there is no token of her way to be found; but the light air being beaten with the stroke of her wings and parted with the violent noise and motion of them, is passed through, and therein afterwards no sign where she went is to be found."

In research libraries and special collections words and objects come into their own and have their place again. This known world. This exact moment—a little afterwards—not quite—

Most of my writing life has been spent in Connecticut not far from where Hannah Edwards Wetmore lived and wrote. Reading her "private writings" I experience, through an occult invocation of verbal links and forces, the qualities peculiar to our seasonal changing light and color. It's a second kind of knowledge—tender, tangled, violent, august, and infinitely various.
walking just below my father’s orchard (after I had walked just below my father’s orchard after, by religion and the concerns of my soul, my business played for an allowed a with an awakening sense of)

Early November evening with frost forecast—the sight of a bare bough caught by streetlight outside my window—electric. False beauty and confined beauty. Relict.

The closer I look—the farther away your interlaced co-conscious pattern.

Names shelter us under the wings of first creation. Hannah’s first name begins and ends with the aspirate phoneme h. Spectral letter h—occur—quick thought—reached through the fire of art—

To reach is to touch.
Poetry has no proof nor plan nor evidence by decree or in any other way. From somewhere in the twilight realm of sound a spirit of belief flares up at the point where meaning stops and the unreality of what seems most real floods over us. The inward ardor I feel while working in research libraries is intuitive. It's a sense of self-identification and trust, or the granting of grace in an ordinary room, in a secular time.
1699 Trans plant
Trans. plant. a. tion
planting in anot
Trans. plant. er 
Tran. splen. dent 
Trans. pūrt. er ecsta
for transportat
Trans. pūrt vby to car
pleasure, to vi
Trans. pūrt. a. ble
Trans. pūrt. a. tic
Trans. pūrt. er 

I may be transmitted by sending from one sending through another, and, deemed in one to another, to pass mission, may be transmitted susceptibility of instance, be of change into

PAGES 47–50
One of three notebooks made from various scraps of paper used for making fans and bound by hand.

PAGE 53
Hannah Edwards Wetmore, "Private Writings" transcribed by her daughter, Lucy Wetmore Whittelsay, after her mother’s death, n.d.
"O! that I had the wings of a dove, that I might fly away and be at rest— But whither could I fly, O, that I could find some more sure & abiding good portion, and no longer be the sport, of these alluring, deceiving, enjoyments. I am weary with pursuing shadows, where shall I find real & substantial good— How long shall I wander from Mountain to Hill, seeking Rest and finding none— Oh, that I could find the way but I cannot. could but find a rest for the sole of my foot. but I am lost and bewildered, and weary myself to find the way, but cannot— I am weary with my vain Life yet afraid to Die—
"I am plagued all my Life long with a levity of mind, which flutters & tosses me to & fro, from one vanity to another; till I am weary, & heart sick, and pursuing shaddows & things that I know, are nothing.
"— But when I am deeply afflicted, by some great Disappointment, or the loss of something dear unto me, it poises my mind, & a little tames my frenzy."

Emily Dickinson, manuscript A 320, penciled text fragment inscribed on torn-away flap of an envelope, c. 1880s.

Long Years
Dim - For
Breach a
second can
fill -
+The absence

Emily Dickinson, manuscript A 169, penciled text fragment on white stationery, c. 1880s. This trace fragment is a variant wording of the line "For he is grasped of God" in the poem beginning "Drowning is not so pitiful."

Grasped by
God –

PAGE 59

PAGE 60
peripheries of light - doom etc - myrmidons
that's - falcon
A drone leads legible to lifted eyes
The prophecy now rises from its script
these circling wings sustained
these circling wings sustained
Through cloud-scurf
float
The sky's dim rafters
There singing the lost bird, Walt!
To trail its imminence in song
in spiral
the only sentences proved in the skies
The dream of Daedalus, registered
The zone of my myth - doom shelters in cloud drift
The cipher - decipherings - winged Sesames.
The clipped
O stanchioned as a star, a razor sheen
The

“Having gone so high as we could with the bote, we met divers Salvages in Canowes, well laden with the flesh of Beares, Deere, and other beasts, whereof we had part, here we found mighty Rocks, growing in some places above the ground as high as the shrubby trees, and divers other solid quarries of divers tinctures; and divers places where the waters had falne from the high mountaines they had left a tinctured spangled skurfe, that made many bare places seeme as guiled. Digging the crowne above in the highest cliffs of rocks, we saw it was claie sand so mingled with the yeallow spangles as if it had beene halfe pin-dust.”

Captain John Smith,
The Generall Historie of Virginia, New England & the Summer Isles (1624)