***L a***

***l a b y r i n t h i a***

***b h***

***y t***

***r n***

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***r n***

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***a i***

***L a b y r i n t h i a***

***Daedalus & Assoc.***

*Inscription over the Entrance*

*Look closely at your thread,*

*Theseus: it, too, is a labyrinth.*

*Just for a lark—on the wing—*

*We designed this labyrinth*

*And placed at its heart, on a plinth,*

*A replica of the thing.*

*And if you have taken the trouble*

*To find this place—if you enter*

*And venture your way to the centre*

*Where the structure scales down to its double,*

*You may make out, inside the model,*

*A fraction of the labyrinth*

*With* its *model placed on a plinth*

*Like a ship squeezed into a bottle.*

*Reduced to the size of an elf*

*Is a figure in a mirror*

*Growing gradually clearer*

*Till you are sure it must be yourself.*

*Does something in you feel at hoëm*

*In this metaphysical trap,*

*Like a house in a town on a map*

*Or a word in a line in a poëm?*

*Place within place, and no place,*

*Clues hiding clues within clues…*

*She means to amaze you, the Muse*

*Who inspired this amusing maze.*

***Deployments of the Labyrinth***

1. *Inscription*

THE DEVIL AT THE ENTRANCE ISN’T DANGEROUS

THE SELF WITHIN, THE CENTRAL SELF? A STRANGER.

THE ANGEL AT THE EXIT IS NO ANGEL.

2. *Enter MCV*

*Be calm. There is no exit from*

*The Library of Babel’s maze.*

*From aisle to aisle you move, and graze*

*Upon the books till Kingdom come,*

*Which it will not—save in* this *version.*

*Remove it from the shelf. You see?*

*‘Kingdom comes in three-thousand-three’.*

*A mistranslation from the Persian*.

*The riddles beckon, and one delves.*

*As I have written in a book*

*For which you shouldn’t try to look*

*On the infinity of shelves:*

*MCV MCV MCV MCV MCV MCV*

*MCV MCV MCV MCV MCV MCV\**

*MCV MCV\*\* MCV MCV MCV MCV*

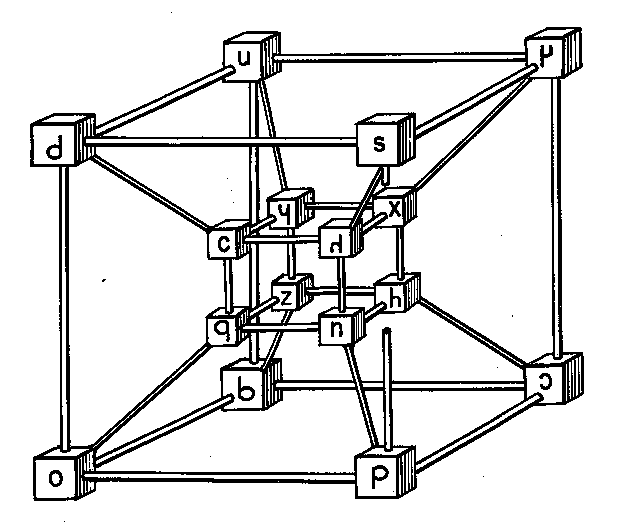
*MCV MCV MCV MCV MCV MCV Quoted in* MCV: The Autobiography.

*\** An acronym: ‘Marcel Chérit Vinteuil’. A message from M. Proust.

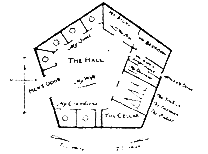
\*\* One-thousand-one-hundred-five, but only in *this* instantiation.

Can also be construed temporally as 11:05, but only *antemeridian*.

*MCV… Any relation to you, my Mr V?*



*Mi casa e su casa.*

***The Aleph and Other Things***

*By elegantly and accurately dreaming, a young, near-*

*sighted Argentinian author (de)materialises before me.*

*Out of an infinite number of incompossible Borgesii,*

*he is the one who happens to appear as a semi-fictional*

*character in a poem by Oscar Wilde. Or does he? The author has asked to be identified*

*in the text as ‘MCV’.—*[Mr V]

*Among the particles, one particle MCV appears in a wizard’s robe, black as night.*

*Contains the others, all of them.*

*Some call him Aleph. Some say Shem.*

*Chapter and clause, to the least article,*

*Is there, of particles and laws.*

*I saw my own face in it, and*

*My bowels, as well, saw from left-hand*

*And right-hand, fore and aft. No loss*

*Is suffered not retrieved elsewhere,*

*Though perhaps very far away*

*And inaccessible to-day,*

*Perhaps for ever. Need we care?*

*Why is it not enough to wander*

*In wonder through the labyrinth*

*That in a temple on a plinth*

*Is laid out for a god to ponder?*

*Though you may think yourself behind*

*Doors, you in fact are on a plane*

*Projected, in a square. In vain*

*From Aleph’s hyper-cubic mind*

*You ‘hide’: he sees your face. He sees*

*Your entrails. Fail to understand*

*This and you are trapped in Flatland.*

*Who sees not, him the Blind Ones seize.*

*The wizard gear is put aside and we sit down together*

*\* on an old-fashioned chintz divan. We are in MCV’s*

*library (which is technically infinite), cocktails in hand.*

***The Birth of Labyrinthia***

***as Told by MCV***

1.

Chile fell into civil war

And self-seceded, west from east.

Chile, as such, is now deceased.

There are two where one had been before.

East Chile has *its* east and west.

These fight, as east with west will do:

East Chile breaks itself in two.

The reader can divine the rest:

West Chile, with *its* west and east,

Comes to the same result. Now, *four*

Countries where two had been before.

(Not that this matters in the least.)

Never is donned the irenic robe

Of international community,

From which the countries feel immunity,

For each is bitterly xenophobe.

This mad mitotic trend for years

Goes on, and each seceding land

Has narrower territory, and

Proportionately, the frontiers

Increase their territorial share.

Walk, and you cross a boundary; stand,

And straddle. There’s no room, no land,

Only the borders, everywhere.

2.

How name these subdivided lands

After so many iterations

Of east-west subdividing nations?

With so much little on their hands

Some poets suggest names like ‘Rose

West Eastern Chile’, ‘Lily East

Thrice-West’, the name increased

The more, the less the country grows.

On the street’s eastern side stands one

Nation, and on the western side,

Another; across that Great Divide,

The street itself, fire mortar and gun.

Some lands insist on numerals

Based on the Dewey decimal system.

The Founding Fathers, in their wisdom,

Named one land (seized, some say, on false

Pretences), ‘PR823

.J5 7325’.

Another name’s a Boolean hive:

Those *noughts* and *ones* spell sovereignty.

3.

Born out of so ingrown and vexed

A microgeopolitics,

The bickering Labyrinthians mix

Like strands of a disputed text.

To list the burgeoning names, with lower

And lower national populations,

Of these proliferating nations,

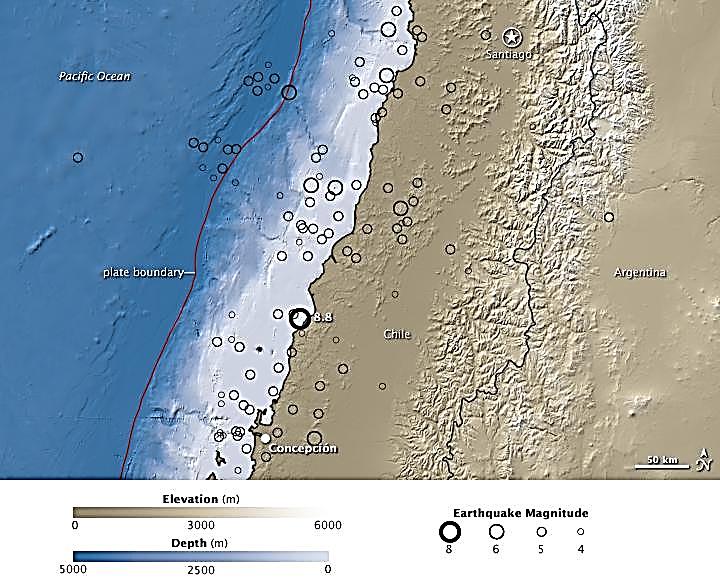
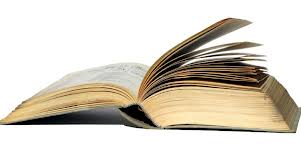
*The Encyclopaedia of Nowhere*

Has been compiled: a ninety-nine-

Ton-tome. After much legal battling,

The Book is laid down open, straddling

Several countries, on its spine.



***Theseus***

Enter the labyrinth once more,

Take up the thread, the rescue mission.

(Why should she let you lose your way?)

Down halls torch-lighted, echoing

With cries, inch, cautiously, to where

A carnivore with cloven feet

Lives at the centre of the myth

On sacrificial virgin meat.

The swooping blade. The glassy stare.

You saved the young ones, hero! Bring

Them back into the light of day.

But the myth wills its repetition.

Enter the Labyrinth once more.



***How Certain is ‘Curtain’?***

** ***A Philological Tragicomedy***

*Hermes leads me through a*

*labyrinth made of words.*

1.

*Open the curtains, dear. Let pass*

*The coaches and the clouds awhile.*

*Here is a tale to make you smile:*

*A story about words. If as*

*A philologian I may speak,*

*The etymology of ‘curtain’*

*Is veiled behind a weak, uncertain*

*Vulgate translation of the Greek.* *Which in turn renders*

*Heb.* yeriah *in Exodus.*

Cortina *means, in classical*

*Latin, ‘cauldron’, diminutive*

*Of* cortem*, from which we derive Derived in turn from*

*The ‘court’ in ‘courtyard’. (Thus the ‘fall’ cohortem (nom. cohors).*

*Of language brings a faint recall*

*Of etymology.) In Greek, ‘curtain’*

*(*Aulaia*) connects with a certain*

*Custom: not using doors at all*

*But rather curtains opening*

*On courts, as much as possible*

*Allowing the house to breathe and fill*

*With air, and what the breezes bring*

*Into it of their cool, with fragrant*

*Hints of a bright Athenian day.—*

*‘Curtain’ is but a silly say;*

*Consider it a semantic vagrant.*

*A cauldron serving as a door!*

*We’ve much to thank confusion for,*

*Like those illusions we adore*

*Until found true, and thus a bore.*

2*. The King, the Door, and the Assassins*

*The door is thick (with walls to match)*

*As the rooms lodged within are deep,*

*And has compartments spies can creep*

*Through on their intramural watch.*

*This makes the door a kind of room*

*Large enough to store, in one chamber,*

*Cauldrons with oil or fragrant amber*

*Filled; in another, at her loom,*

*A Norn is spinning out a cloth*

*Embroidered with a tragic story,*

*Which some might call an allegory:*

*The Angel Turned into a Moth.*

*An eyeless Norn the pattern feeds.*

*From sister Fates she brooks the schism,*

*Feeling her way by algorithm,*

*The writer, not the one who reads.*

**

*So thick a door has its own walls.*

*Through these a fricative sussuration*

*Like running water’s circulation*

*Of rats down intramural halls*

*Scurrying provides a score of rushed*

*And hurried whisperings, as of some*

*Omen of dire events to come.*

*And they will not quelled or hushed.*

*Behind the walls are other walls,*

*And behind these, the Old Ones Wait.*

*Nothing’s more ancient than their hate.*

*They bide their time till Master calls.*

*They are off-coloured. Red-ed, blue-lue,*

*Green-reen: Colours for ever fleeing*

*Themselves, they so abhor their being.*

*They give their hate the name CTHULU.*

3.

*The King who broods within the walls*

*In one of myriad rooms (the palace,*

*Dear, was designed, with subtle malice,*

*As a maze, and ghosts walk the halls),*

*The King who drains his cup and laughs*

*For one insanely barking moment*

*And then declines all further comment,*

*Numbed by the Rhenish that he quaffs,*

*Is on all sides by foes surrounded.*

 *Ah, the Great have great enemies!*

*He squeezes his mind’s eye, and sees*

*Some stones unturned, no fears unfounded.*

*The King is in a parlous way*

*For he is trapped, besieged by mirrors*

*That multiply him by his terrors.*

*They own his mind. He is their prey.*

*The assassin in the door is dazed*

*By thump of treadle and rush of rodents,*

*And by a maze of chambers so dense*

*He wanders lost and slightly crazed.*

*The assassin in the walls is guided*

*By priests to a small entrance whence*

*He issues, knife in hand. His sense*

*Of orientation a decided*

*Turn for the hapless takes, however,*

*For where the hidden King may be*

*Is anyone’s theology.*

*This murderer, too, is lost, and never*

*Heard from again. For there are many*

*Spare spaces in the tombs inside*

*The closets where a ghost may hide.*

*For such, may Charon waive the penny!*

*The King could sometimes wish his killer*

*Might find him, and conclude the endless*

*End-game that so torments him, friendless*

*And weary. From behind a pillar*

*He dreams him springing with the knife*

*And writing in his willing throat,*

*To end a play not worth the groat,*

*A bright red finis to his life.*

4.

*So I ‘draw-to’ this cauldron-curtain*

*Of words and all therein contained.*

*I hope it was not well explained:*

*One wants things thus, a bit uncertain.*

***The Queene of Labyrinthia***



Complexities, in the end, defeat

Design. The maze grows only denser.

Think of those episodes in Spenser

Where plain knights weave in dark conceit

‘Mongst nymphs and wizards and what-not,

Until the allegory spins

So many myths of origins

That Virgil’s oak is overwrought

With Ovid’s ivy. ‘Hard begin’, The Faerie Queene, *III, iii, 21.*

What is your end? You have too many

Of these to be said to have any,

And fewer the ways out than in.

So highly charged with gorgeous Eros,

♫

Infected will unwilling serves

Erected wit, and sensory nerves

Are insolent squires to his knight-heroes.

A knight may ‘gainst his interest act,

His better judgment; what he fears he *Prince Arthur and the Fairy Queen (Fuseli).*

Is overtaken by: his Circe

Turns hoggish mind to bodily fact.

The thread tatters to threads, to broken

Endings leading. But these are new

Beginnings, each a chance to do

It all again, new vows are spoken

In a tempestuous wedding of

The pagan and the mediaeval,

Protestant God and Catholic Devil.

It is the straying that we love.

\*



Spenser, you hated us, it’s true. *Hated the Irish, that is.*

Hysteria mars your fantasy.

But though you fear to set him free,

Eros exuberates from you.

You wrestle to the ground but can’t

Pin down the daemon. He will rise

Again. What spell could exorcise

The Protean from the Protestant?

***Proteus, Menelaus***

Wing, claw, tooth, tusk… Sunlight will crystallise

That shimmer into a single shape, the real

God’s face. Pinned to himself, he will reveal

Meanings and answers, will be tame and wise.

*This is why you have been condemned to roam*

*The seas: you have offended Zeus. The breach*

*Must heal. Perform the rites and you will reach*

*Your Spartan homeland, your Elysian home.*

But in those plush Fields, safe from mortal storms,

The man stays tied to his identity:

*Heroic Cuckold*. Proteus, breaking free,

Escapes into the labyrinth of his forms.



***The Forking Paths and the Zohar***

*By elegantly and accurately dreaming, a young, near-*

*sighted Argentinian author (de)materialises before me*

*out of an infinite number of incompossible Borgesii,*

*He is the one that happens to appear as a semi-fictional*

*character in a poem by Oscar Wilde. Or does he? The author has asked to be identified in the text as*

*‘MCV’.—*[Mr V] *Hmm. Any relation to you, dear?*

*You never wrote the book you should We are sitting in MCV’s library (which*

*Have written.* Thou of little faith! *is technically infinite), cocktails in hand.*

*Oscar, my dear, you* are *a wraith.*

I am writing *you*. You are quite good.

*You* know *you were almost always right.*—

*Almost*? I see a falling off,

Apostate! *It’s praise, not a scoff.*

It takes but one mistake: Good-night!

*I have not made* enough *mistakes,*

*I long to make* outrageous *ones.*

You speak *my* language now, for once!

Yes, make as many as you can:

You may end up where none has been.

*And if it is a luckless place?*

No matter. We both know the race

Is not to swift or slow. To win

Is to lose opportunities

To fail in a magnanimous way:

For poetry this wins the day.

Explore all possibilities—

*Oh infinite possibilities!*

*There is a place where polymaths*

*Wander like fools down garden paths*

*That fork into insanities.*

And in a parallel dimension

You are the Chinaman who spies

For the Huns. I’m the one who tries

To open up to you the intention,

Unfathomably deep, of your

Forefather’s garden, in which grew

The Book it was. You never knew

Until I told you that, before

You even asked, you were the scion

Of one who seemed a failure to

His family, even to you,

But was a visionary Lion.

*Well, he was infinitely clever,*

*That much is obviously true.*

*I owe my happiness to you.*

*Never shall I forget you. Never!*

And here you take a pistol from

Your pocket and shoot me. The name

Of the ‘ammo’ depot is the same

As that of the town to which you’ve come.

You were successful. Headlines tell

The Kaiser’s men the place to bomb.

With an inscrutable aplomb

You will wear the noose. You have done well.

*My death is penance, and it is*

*An act of gratitude, and love.*

*But meanwhile, in another of*

*My multiple realities,*

*I am a minor character*

*In a book written by a ghost.*

*There is a story, almost lost*

*In the sub-plots, in which* I*, sir,*

*Am the author of this book. This part*

*Is the key to the whole structure, and*

*Disproves that you had any hand*

*In the making of this work of art.*

*In* this *thread I am the narrator:*

*‘The stairway spiraled roundabout.*

*As I looked down, while leaning out*

*Over the trembling banister,*

*‘My father’s corpse went falling by.*

*It had been falling many years,*

*Skeletonised. I watched my tears,*

*A few drops, like rain in a dry*

*‘Climate, fall after him. They will*

*Evaporate within the hour.*

*Above, the stairs of Babel Tower*

*Shrink into the illimitable’.*

I am that father, am I not,

Falling into his past again?

A corpse that falls and falls… And when

He lands, he wakes—is that the plot?—

In C.3.3., and watches, this

Time, as he looks over his own

Shoulder as he looks over his own

Shoulder as he looks over his

Own shoulder… *Do you feel it, then,*

*The turning screw, the winding stair?*

What is that old man writing there?

*Born you shall surely be again.*

But a much older man looks on

Over his shoulder, and to him

A *child* is writing something grim:

*The debt is due, your last chance, gone.*

The one behind *him* sees a child.

He’s even older, and takes a pen.

*Can you describe the ‘regimen’*

*In Purgatory, Mr Wilde?*

He writes. Another imitates

This act, behind *him.* He is older

Still. So I look over *his* shoulder:

*Don’t worry too much over dates,*

He writes. To me, the oldest of men,

*He* seems the youngest of them all.

*Here is a note-book*. If I scrawl

*Born you shall surely be again*,

Would the ourobouros bite its tail,

The circle close? *You, young again*

*And yet as old as time, would then*

*Be hearer, teller, and endless tale.*

*So I have brought you face to face*

*With the Unending.* To a Greek,

Can one even speak

Of it, let alone give it place

And time, or any pleasing shape?

And yet you *frame* the Infinite

With elegance, you make it fit

Inside an image, a landscape,

A looking glass, a labyrinth

Or labyrinthine garden. Why,

You almost set Infinity

Upon a fluted marble plinth!

3.*The Zohar*

*This version has it that you are*

*A man who is obsessed, so much*

*So, it is all you see and touch:*

*I mean the false coin, your Zohar.*

*You wake, and there is the Zohar.*

*You dream Zohar. You hear him call.*

*You paint the Zohar on the wall.*

*It is the Self you think you are.*

*Your vision becomes, finally,*

*Spherical, and the great Zohar*

*Stands in the centre, a dark star,*

*And front and back at once you see.*

*What can you do now but go out*

*Into the desert that you are*

*And fix on the great god Zohar*

*You will for ever think about?*

*And now you* are *the great Zohar:*

*You are the look of the Zohar,*

*And what is seen by the Zohar*

*And the Zohar of the Zohar!*

***Theseus, Tithonus***

1.

How many quests is Romance made

Of? How many mazes are there

In the House of Mazes? Climb the stair-

Case in its spiraling, past the jade

Monkey simpering on its plinth

Again, and again pass the jade

Monkey: the charm begins to fade

Of living in a labyrinth.

So many stairs to climb, and quests

To question or to quest, *that* is

The question. There is deep unease,

Arthritis in the knees, the guests—

The guests!—have long since gone, and I?

I am your charming host, Tithonus.

I bear my house, its creaking onus,

With shrinking strength, and dimming eye.

I am the weary master of

The mazes, and their slave. My heap

Of questing-trophies I still keep

In a room several floors above.

There I am, sitting by myself.

They’ll never find me here in this

Attic. My *Don Quixote* is

Looking sad up there, on the shelf.

2.

Once more, dear friends, into the maze!

Is getting lost perhaps the only way

Out of here? It will be a lonely way.

I still must serve so many days,

So many days, so little time!

It is not gentlemanly to *rush*.

Nor yet to beat about the bush,

When burning. Ah, these walls, this *lime!*

***The Minotaur***



Or is he something different,

This creature waiting in the centre?

One part of him is a young renter

Used and discarded, perhaps bent

On vengeance for my having shown him

Glimpses of a world not his own,

Spoiled now for *his*, stranded, alone

In the sea back to which I’d thrown him,

Now alienated from his kind

And to the Paradise he’d known

Denied re-entry, *twice*-alone.

(All this takes place inside my mind!)

Parts of him are my family,

It may be: Constance and my sons.

A good husband and father once,

When I pursued debauchery

As if it were my holy grail,

I quite forgot them, gave them not

A thought. I left my wife distraught,

My sons neglected. And I fail,

Even now, to understand just *why*.

The monster is the unhappy life

My helpless sons led when my wife

Could find no reason not to die,

When they were left to the cold care

Of relatives who punished them

For *my* sins. For *this* I condemn

Myself to climb, stair after stair,

The spiral of my guilt, to thread

The maze of my indifference

To loved ones. Acts that made no sense

Now make that *nightmare* sense, that dread

You’d feel, trapped in a prison-maze

Of the kind drawn by Piranesi,

Cruelly, *rigorously* crazy,

And infinite are the crooked ways.

And not one way leads anywhere,

Or leads you back to where you started,

A wilderness that can’t be charted—

And the monster waits hidden there.

Clutched in its hand there is an ace

Of clubs, or simply a club, or say,

A card left at a club one day.

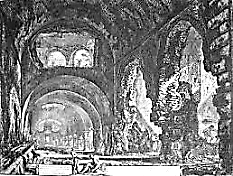
It knows its way around this place.

I know he keeps his hungry den

Somewhere inside. I hesitate

And hide until it is too late.

The nightmare must come round again.



*The National Flag of Labyrinthia.*

***Stanzas for Asterion***

*The cursed are sacred, they are set*

*Apart. They wander lost in rooms*

*That have no house, and darkness glooms*

*Over the floors a spreading net.*

*He came for you, he kept his pledge,*

*And in his hand your head swung free*

*Of Gordion-knotted intricacy*

*Solved by the simplest, keenest edge.*

******

***The Jolly Corner***

*One minute before 11:05 AM,*

*28 February, 1939.* *It is time.*

1.

There is a house James writes about,

The Jolly Corner. In it dwells

A threatening ghost who is—what else?—

The hero’s double. Fear and doubt

Assail him, and a sense of shame:

What sort of life might he have led

As worldly businessman, instead

Of the rich idler he became?

One’s real life is the life one *did*

Not lead. The man of flesh and blood

Is thus the ghost of what he could

Have been. There’s no way to be rid

Of him, the double who is and

Is not himself. He can’t erase him.

He is too strong. So he must face him.

Two missing fingers on one hand

Bespeak a man who has known strife—

A man of action—and because

Of this, has suffered. They must cross,

The two paths of the hero’s life,

The one he took, his present life,

And the uncanny path not taken,

The possibility forsaken.

Enraged, the double like a knife

Thrusts himself at the hero, who

From fear collapses in a faint.

In the arms of a female saint,

A loving friend, the man comes to.

Is he alive? Will he go on,

Merged with his ‘animus’, to lead

A stronger life? Or is he dead,

And dreaming this companion

In the afterlife? Has he survived

Himself as someone else, his double?

The author leaves us here, to trouble

Over the sequel. He who lived

Was not alive. The life he failed

To live took the shape of a ghost

Livelier than he. Who is host

And who is guest? What is unveiled?

3.

Before I walk into a space

Thoroughly emptied of my life

And full of freedom from all strife,

There’s one more trial that I shall face,

My last trial, which is self-imposed:

To face my Double. I will ascend

Along a spiral to the end

Of memory. Then my Book is closed.

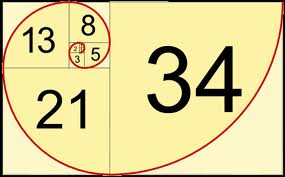
Or open, of the human cry

Exhausted. Tears evaporate

In air, traces of love and hate

Dissolve into their home, the sky.



***Of Fibonacci Numbers***

[*I find myself standing in a lecture hall in Magdalen College.*

*I am at that indeterminate age somewhere between the 39*

*I claimed to be at the First Trial and the 40 that I actually*

*was. Dante is responsible for this Purgatorial joke: he has*

*made me, a maths dunce, Professor of Mathematics! His*

*last hurrah. The students seem restless and bored.*]

1.

Behold! a Golden Spiral on

A coin, in a rectangle!—I

Confess, it is a false coin: φ φ *= the Golden Ratio (1.6108339887…).*

Is not attained, ever–anon *The Fibonacci spiral is built on integers but*

*approaches to the Golden Ratio at infinity.*

Approached though it may be, for mine *The Fibonacci sequence represents the closest*

Are Fibonacci ratios, *approximation to the Golden Ratio using*

I am almost *certain*. (Ah, they doze! *rational numbers: 2/1, 3/2, 5/3,  8/5…*

At least it’s nearly time to dine.) —[Mr V]

2. *A Lecture of Sorts*

If one and one make two, and one

And two make three, and we get five

From three and two, then shall we strive

For eight? And by addition

Most horrible reach dread thirteen?

Which I can barely say! What fun

I had when I was twenty-one,

Betwixt a little, and between,

It’s true, but so? At thirty-four

I had moved out towards the extreme

And I don’t even care to dream

What waits at fifty-five or more,

Say, eighty-nine, how inconceivable!

O sequence rabbit-multiplying

Who rule the breeding and the dying!

Wrinkled the skin grows, irretrievable

The loss of youth’s crisp curls of hair,

Irrevocable the greying trend

When in a steep ascent you bend

To infinity and leave us there

So far behind you, husks outworn

*Leonardo Fibonacci, a 13th-century mathemati-*

*cian, independently rediscovered the ‘Fibonacci*

*sequence’ and used it in an idealised thought-*

*experiment to chart the growth of a rabbit pop-*

*ulation. Oscar fails to grasp a key assumption of*

*the experiment, that the rabbits do not die. It is*

*interesting to note that the sequence was first*

*discovered by Indian scholars in the 6th century*

*AD and applied to Sanskrit prosody—specifically,*

*to rationalise the relationship between long and*

*short syllables. So Poetry and Maths come full*

*circle, eccentrically. (Let me add in passing that*

*Fibonacci’s far more consequential contribution*

*to Western Civlisation was to introduce and*

*popularise the use of Hindu-Arabic numerals.)*

—[Mr V]

By the genetic seeds we hold

In trust deceived when rendered old,

Redundant, and then, why be born?

The numbers spin their lazy eight-

Approaching vehicle around;

I come back to the launching ground

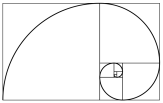
Of one plus one, if somewhat late.

Now God is surely One. To be

Incarnate, unity makes two

In one, for God is Lord Christ, too.

And Holy Ghost makes Trinity



And the duality atones,

And two and three are five, and three

And five, eight: add these last and we

Reach the unspeakable number once

More. Evil arithmetic! But I

Will brave the Fibonacci numbers,

Though nightmares may invade my slumbers.

I recognise no boundary.

We’ll set sail for the Ratio

Of Gold, though we shall never reach

That place, my Dears! Ulysses, teach

Your mates the Perilous Way to go!

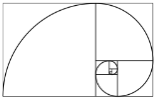
With what is left us of this so- *I have forgotten that I am already*

Brief vigil of the human senses, *past this vigil. Ah, to be carried away by*

Let us learn how immense the Immense is, *one’s own rhetoric, like a blushing bride!*

Let us know what it is to know!

**

***The Ascension of Old China Blue***

*Here, at the podium again?*

*Time: 16 October, 1946.*

*The ‘spiral vase’ seems to be a sort of Klein bottle, un-*

*bounded, non-orientable in space and rather self-absorbed.*

—[Mr V]

1.

Spiral in shape, my fictive vase

Became a staircase I must climb

To view a different place and time

At every turn of what I was.

[*A student creates a disturbance, heckling this tentative*

*beginning as stilted aestheticism. He is escorted out*

*of the lecture hall. A bit ruffled, I must start again.*]

1.

Spiral in shape, my fictive vase

Became a staircase I must climb

To view a different place and time

At every turn of what I was.

2.

I have told you how my spiral vase

Became a staircase I must climb

To view a different place and time.

But did you know that what I was

I saw as what I would become?

And on each landing was a bust

Of something crumbling into dust.

I was alone, and far from home.

3.

You can predict my spiral vase

Will climb the same stairs every time—

But with a difference, yet a rhyme

At every turn of what I was.

I see the one I did become

And on each landing pass a bust

Crumbling into a different dust.

Then dust is where I make my home?

Each turn affords another view

Down the vertiginous stairwell

To various degrees of Hell.

What I did I cannot undo.

5.

The spiral shape, the fictive vase,

Are versions of the stair I climb

But with the difference, this time,

That I turn into what I was.

I am the man I would become

And on each landing pass a bust

Resembling, but only just,

A face that I once knew at home.

Each turn affords a brother view

Or mother view, down the stairwell,

And those whose life I made a Hell

I see, and know not what to do.

The memory of the floors below

Is an accretion of my loss.

A fictive vase with serious flaws

Is the best metaphor I know

For the heartbreak that heals you when

You see the past sink out of view

Like the wrecked vessel that is you.

And you must turn, and turn again.

8. *Constance*

It spirals into itself, my vase,

No matter how far I may climb.

So I grow smaller every time

I see I am smaller than I was.

How unbecoming to become

The man I am! I think the bust

Is of the monkey of my lust.

The likeness of a broken home.

I turn to get a better view

And in the depths of the stairwell

I see a face I once knew well.

She wore a veil and said, *I do.*

The memory of it years ago

Became oblivious to its loss.

That’s one of my more serious flaws.

It happened on the floor below

And all her heartbreak happened *then*.

But now her face sinks out of view

And there is nothing I can do

But turn and turn and turn again.

I am sorry Constance! I am so sorry.

But that was on a different floor.

And there are many, many more.

Of course, each story is a story.

Happiness was a thing that used

To happen to me. I am a child

Of mood. My name is Oscar Wilde.

My breath is short. My feet are bruised.

The more I climb the more there is

To climb. Must every step create

Another step? And it grows late.

How shall I ever get out of this?

13. *My Children*

The downward spiral of a vase

Is the inversion of sublime.

Innocent victims of a crime

I see, of which I was the cause.

And into focus now they come,

As I look down. I pass a bust

I do not notice, for I must

Assess the damage as a sum:

I turn to get a better view

And in the depths of the stairwell

I see the children I loved well.

There’s nothing that I would not do

For them, but that was years ago

I did that to them. For I was

As fictive as a spiral vase.

And I weep down on them below,

On all their heartache and their pain.

But now their faces sink from view.

The thing I did again I do.

The turning has returned again.

Cyril, Vyvyan, I am so sorry!

They led me in, and shut the door.

I shall not see you anymore.

Hell is less harsh than Purgatory!

How cruelly you were abused

By relatives who raised you. ‘Wilde’

Was not your name. No, no, no child

Deserves to be so meanly used!

The more I weep the more there is

To weep. What can I do but hate

Myself, or blame it all on fate?

That it is *that*, that it is *this*.

But Cyril, you went off to war

And came back as the ghost I saw

And in the terror and the awe

The tearing open of a scar

Occurred, and I shall call it healing.

And you became my Happy Prince,

With the poor swallow gone long since.

No fire consumes the heart of feeling.

The bird shall sing, the Prince shall praise

The giving of the gems away.

He is in Paradise today.

My vase can only crack and craze.

My heart is in the urn with him.

Ash of my ashes, you, my son,

And Vyvyan, too. All into one

The ashes settle, light grows dim.

How many steps, and for how long

Must I continue to ascend

Into a sky that has no end

To make a rightness of the wrong?

21. *Bosie*

My spiral is a weary vase.

The staircase cannot cease to climb

Through larger spaces, longer times,

Surprised to see how small it was

When higher iterations come

Not quite full circle. And the bust

Is of a spiral quite nonplussed:

The vase contains itself. Its home

Is in another home. Review

The Hellish stories down the well.

Remember Bosie, and your cell.

The panther feasts, and what was due

In the end, and how it fell. Below

My station. Too much revel was

Enough to shatter a fictive vase,

With revelations bringing woe

To me, and Art’s ache, and the pain

Of sacrifice betrayed. My view

Is blurred, my eyes are moist with dew.

Again return, return again,

Dear Bosie, tell once more the story

Of how I walked a stony floor

For you. See how much rope I tore!

Think how the morning’s morning glory

Returns to mourn at evening. Bruised

Is the apple of my eye. Reviled

For ever is this Oscar Wilde.

And I believe you were amused.

The more I brood the more there is

To brood upon. But it is late.

The end game crawls to the checkmate.

Failure, what is the sense of this?

Is Cupid Mars, so to love war?

Your character may have a flaw,

My dear. You lived by your own law

And so did I, but I have the scar

To prove it, you, nostalgic feeling.

Forgiveness when the lover sins

Must scourge him first and make him wince,

But for some wounds there is no healing.

I swallow up my pride these days

For it was I who chased away

My Bird of Paradise. I pray

My pride may go up in a blaze

Of wisdom, but the chance is slim

That I will be the lucky one

Whose ashes fly into the sun.

The Phoenix fire is guttering dim.

The day is short, the shadow long.

And time can never put an end

To brazen sorrow, my old friend,

And grief’s perpetual undersong.

You were my slim-gilt lily boy,

You had the genius of your youth.

I had the genius of my mouth,

My honeyed tongue, my gift for joy.

You were my prince, my fleur de lys

And flirtily familiar with

A thirtyish man who was a myth,

And is a myth eternally.

I fell. You did not make me fall.

The myth, at higher iterations,

Opens onto what revelations?

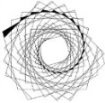
Revels unravel. I willed it *all*.

Perhaps blue blood and a blue face

Cancel each other into love,

Somehow. But from the floor above,

This story is of other days

Much darker down, a depth unclean

With hate. The Irish cock-and-bull

Must face John Bull, and he is full

Of Minotaur. It is obscene.

And how obscene *we* were, together

In our adventures in rough trade!

In Naples love is known to fade

Beside a Bay, in autumn weather.

My spiral is a maze of wandering,

Wandering up to who knows where?

No ceiling but the empty air.

The stars, perhaps, were made for pondering.

The ghosts of old astrologers

Have left their eye-prints on the skies

That do not care who lives and dies.

The stars are Tinkers, Travellers.

34. *The Marquis*

This spiral of blue china, vase

Full of itself, was once sublime.

What is most beautiful with time

Becomes the shade of what it was.

It is the time when monsters come

Out of the closet. Broken bust

Of ugliness, you are the just

Likeness of one who broke my home.

And he comes gibbering into view

And wants to pull me down the well

Into the hate that is his Hell.

What an unspeakable thing to do,

Enter my house and threaten so,

And here you come again! My vase,

Though but the shards of what it was,

Brims over like a cup of woe.

How mad I was to fight the insane!

Could it be monstrously true

That you are me, and I am you?

I turn again. What do I gain?

Fresh understanding of the gory

Details, which who would not deplore?

They are even uglier than before,

And many times I have told this story,

How I was stubborn, and refused

Advice to let it go, and filed

The suit that brought down Oscar Wilde.

Oh, Queensberry was much amused!

The more one hates the more there is

To hate, there is no end of hate.

He is the monster of my fate.

I cannot climb away from this.



Between the gutter and the star

Most thread their way by rote and law.

I wanted both, that was the flaw

That left me with this shameful scar

That makes another wound of healing.

The Screaming Scarlet Monster wins

Again, then a fresh trial begins,

And the familiar awful feeling.

A monster hides in every maze

And of the lost he makes his prey.

The snake in Eden has his way

With every Eve. I curse my days

Of penance, and I glower at *him*,

The one he hated as his son,

That Bosie boy, the Golden One:

The Parsifal who on a whim

Shot down the swan, but the great wrong

That he had done he would defend

Bitterly to the very end.

And still my way is long, too long!

Their faces haunt me, golden boy

And brutish father, arrogant youth

And the beast who sniffed out the truth,

Base metal of a base alloy.

Why will it not be history

That scholars calmly reckon with?

I am still tortured by my myth.

Am I the Sphinx’s Mystery?

The Marquis did not make me fall.

It was my myth grown out of patience

With all reality, the nation’s,

The world’s, the success of it all,

The *fiat lux*, the course of days,

Provisions for below, above,

And in between. I had had enough

Success, I longed to touch the face

Of failure, though it be obscene.

Happiness, sadly, can grow dull.

And the vase becomes overfull

Of emptiness. Down, down careen

The tragic heroes, heaped together

On the ground floor, how low are laid

The saviours by the mess they made!

An end must come to every tether.

Out of control the spiral’s wandering

The twists of its own turns nowhere

But up the iterative stair

Amazed, when what it should be pondering

Is how the stars, the Travellers,

Can find their way across the skies.

They do not know that they are wise

But know that what occurs recurs.

\*

Look there! Could that be Oscar Wilde?

A serious man, some seventy

Years old. Respectability

Weighs on him, there are Honours piled

Upon his back. He is an old

Master. Upon its plinth, the bust

Of him rests solemn and august,

And he, as well, feels marble-cold,

Depressed by a lifelong success

Which through the decades grew to be

A species of vulgarity

That used to cause him some distress.

But what an *oeuvre* he compiled…

Asterion has eyes so mild!

To being a *Sir* Oscar Wilde

He is grudgingly reconciled.

I am the satyr, and his double

And Doppelgänger—I am the ungrounded

Bacchus, the Man of Gestures wounded.

He is glad he never knew such trouble.

\*

Everything learns to say farewell

By moving farther from its source

Because this is its only course.

We tell what we won’t live to tell.

I bid good-bye, not to my wife

And children, and not to my lover

Or foe, but to the things left over,

The memories of a finished life.

I am beyond myself, beyond

Belief and doubt, and every care.

Estrangement is the truth we share.

The heart of its own heat so fond

Becomes a cloud winds blow away

And leaves behind no scars, no stains.

The lightness of the light remains

When there is nothing left to weigh.

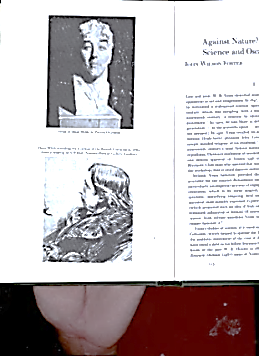
\*

Blue China I at last live up

To, now that I have climbed the stairs,

You are but a sky that puts on airs.

Let spiral be a simple cup.

Circle is ever at odds with square.

Be genially unreconciled.

And shape no bust for Oscar Wilde.

His is a monument of air.

The scent of roses in a vase.

The sunflower, and the flower on high,

The morning glory in the sky.

For I am not the one I was.

\*

We stars are Travellers, and we roam.

Planets and sea-shells are our traces.

We are at home in many places

But there is no such place as home.



­

******

***Triton***

***Shell***

***Horn***

*I am*

*a whisper*

*and an ear.*

*My hollow*

*cup holds*

*distance near.*

*to the*

*Listen world Play me*

*air. ♫ breathe by listening,*

*with in there. turn in your hand*

*fills*

*Bone wind*

*is bone. on the water,*

*Inside you churn of the*

*\* \* \**

*sand.*