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Losing It

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LOSING IT

You are in your sixties, even fifties, and you are walking by a shop window, or in some area in which a security monitor shows a scan of the line you are in. You sneak a look. You see someone in the space where you should be but you do not recognize the interloper. Then, after an unseemly lag of a second or two you are forced to remake your own acquaintance; it seems you no longer know yourself at first sight. The you behind your eyes believes you look like you did twenty years ago, and it assumes that dated image is the real you, even if recent photos tell a horror story. But photos seldom confirmed your self image, even when you were young, so you can dismiss the latest batch. In high school you accepted only one or two out of fifty on the contact sheet as satisfactory, though none of your friends or family, when asked, could distinguish the person in the photos you thought reasonably flattering from the many in which you looked like a total doofus. To them they were all indistinguishably you. They were not even putting you on, as you vainly believed, when they thought the best picture was the one you felt the most loathsome.

Now, at age sixty-five, you supply yourself with the appearance Saint Augustine says you will be accorded at Judgment Day, when you will rise with your thirty-year-old body and looks, which approximates Paul's making your resurrected body match Christ's: "Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Eph. 4.13). The resurrection of the dead heels to our vanity.

The belief in the resurrection of the thirty-year-old body is

sustained by our inability to think of our real selves as the wretched old people we are destined to die as, if we are lucky enough to live so long, just as we are unable to imagine ourselves as the babies we once were. We are alienated, in different ways to be sure, both from the present real image of ourselves as old and from distant images of ourselves before age four. Both are in some sense not us. The old us is made strange by the self-deception I am in the midst of discussing, while we are alienated from the infant us by our inability to imagine, let alone remember, what it was like to be that baby or toddler pictured in the family album.

What bodies are the staggering numbers of babies and toddlers who have fallen victim to the mortality tables to be provided with at the Last Judgment? Does the baby arise as a baby? Or with the body it would have had had it not been nipped in the bud? Opinions differ, but the anonymous poet desperate with longing who, sometime in the second half of the fourteenth century, wrote the moving Middle English poem known as "Pearl" to mourn the death of his two-year-old daughter, sees her in a vision as a queen in heaven, a beautiful maiden, not as a toddler. Yet he is still able to recognize her as the precious pearl he has lost. She rather firmly reprimands her father that his grief is out of order, since she is now a bride of the Lamb. The poet wants to be consoled by the vision, but in the end it only augments his sorrow and grief. The consolation that his faith offers him fails to console him. Some believers, evidently, were unable to shrug off, or become inured to, the grim demographic realities of their world.

If we construct a fantasy of childhood as a time of an unalienated unity of being, then that sense of unity, the actual feeling of it, cannot be recovered by memory but must be accepted on faith, or by supposing it for our own children when they are happily (we think) lost in fantasy and play. But as soon as memories begin, so do memories of fear, anxiety, and shame, of not fitting in, of a vivid image of being mocked at age four in nursery school by a girl a year older because I dribbled chocolate milk down my shirt.

I must say I do not know what older adults those psychologists have been testing, those who, these researchers insist, remember only pleasant feelings, no particulars, mind you, just pleasant feelings from times long past. Have they re-

gressed to that supposed unity of being we impute to children? Once our selves start to multiply in order to handle the various roles we are called on to play as moderately well-socialized actors, good-bye, unity of being, and good-bye, lack of self-consciousness. I never felt I properly learned to play the role of a mature adult. I have tried to discuss interest rates as if knowledgeable about them; I tried to act upset over one of my kid's lousy grades. But I never felt one with the part. If I had a hard time adjusting to the roles demanded in the prime of life, then what am I to do with old age, where I am not even sure I know what I look like? Maybe playing the old man properly requires thinking you are twenty years younger than you are and acting the fool who thinks such. If that is the case, then my very failure to recognize myself in the shop window proves me perfectly immersed in the role of the old man I thought I wasn't.

But with recognition comes deflation and shame, because you fear that others can see your pathetic vanity, that they caught you in the act of such egregiously self-flattering complacency, that they caught an old guy checking himself out in the shop window. Any minimally astute observer, such as one of your students, can see the pretense in the way you talk, or try to hold yourself, which you believe is ramrod straight, but the sag at the knees and the crick in your back betray you. Yet that shame is also its own sort of vanity. It assumes people, younger people, to be exact, are looking at you, or looking at you as anything other than a sixty-something, cancelled soul. As one female student told a female colleague of mine, which my colleague, reveling in *schadenfreude*, hastened to relay to me: "Oh, Professor Miller, he's such a cute old man." That was rather more painful than the specter in the shop window, though I still vividly remember when I was twenty how someone forty might as well have been a member of a different species, or a shade in Charon's boat crossing over. The idea that such moribund souls could be objects of desire or have any themselves was beyond my imaginative powers. And still is. The student and my colleague were instruments of cosmic comic revenge, punishing me for having somewhat too good self-esteem, which like so much self-esteem had become quite unhinged from reality.

Comic for a while. Eventually the genre switches to horror.

When you were a little kid, very little, four or five, the old were not cute, especially the very old. Grandparents were expected, but it was an easy exception to make because they were only in their late forties. The very old, however, were images of death and blight and scared the bejesus out of you. One of my earliest memories is of meeting in a grocery store an old withered soul from our small synagogue in Green Bay and tearfully asking my mother when we escaped if that would happen to me too. The wrinkles, the blotched skin, the gnarled hands that reached to pat my head, the wart with a hair like a dog's whisker sticking out of it—little kids see the world as Gulliver saw it in Brobdingnag—the thick glasses that monstrously magnified the eyes, the goiter on the neck.

I am not quite there yet. Even the shop window did not disconfirm that. The genre I live in is still broad comedy. I get angry when my wife or kids tell me that they responded to my question and that I just did not hear the answer. Am I getting hard of hearing too? More likely they are disdainfully answering and falsely claiming that I did not hear. But that is what my truly hard-of-hearing mother thinks too. Lately, though, when speaking with students I do find myself leaning too close, violating their personal space, using up my one permissible "What?" then hastily jerking back while taking a stab at a sensible response, only to burden them with what turns out to be a non sequitur.

Yet within hours of the encounter with my reflection, even as few as five minutes, I have reconstituted the false me so recently exposed as a delusion. I guess I succumb to positive thinking. You would need the uncompromising eye of Rembrandt to keep seeing yourself as others see you. As long as that false you knows its place and does not make any embarrassing demands on others to confirm overtly its truth, you are welcome to your vanity. You might, for an instant, feel a fool for having your self-conception so divorced from reality, yet you can always find a support group ready to congratulate you for not giving in to ageism, to "socially constructed" categorizations unfavorable to your deluded upbeat view of yourself. And worries on this score cease altogether once you bottom out in true dementia, as in the case of some Alzheimer's patients who neither recognize their written name nor know what they presently look like and are thus unable to find their

way back to their rooms when meandering the nursing home corridor unless there is a picture of themselves outside the room, for they do not recall the room number either. Not just any picture will work, though. The person captured in a recent photo would be a stranger, unrecognizable, but put up a picture taken in their thirties, the prime of life, and they know the room is theirs. Eventually, it seems, you lose the capacity to be embarrassed by the self-serving image the you behind your eyes thinks is you.

We look at ourselves in the mirror every morning without it producing much anxiety. Our face is much easier to deal with than confronting the disgusting transformations below the neck (actually, the neck has its problems too). The mirror was much more dangerous when you were fourteen and a humongous zit had erupted on your forehead hours before the Friday dance. So why the shock of the shop window? Because we are ready for the mirror in the morning (most of the time, anyway); it is a ritual we perform on autopilot. The task at hand occupies us: shaving or combing hair, should there be any. We make sure to see only the part addressed. The stakes are very low, though not so low that I have not taken to shaving in the shower sans mirror. If we must confront the whole countenance, we put on a game face. We have taught ourselves to see not our face but our mirror face, a creature with its own independent existence, like the picture in our high school yearbook, which is no less strangely unreal and out of date.

The horror of the morning mirror is not so much what you see but what you have managed to miss until it is too late. How could that single hair sprouting from your ear have reached a half inch in length before you noticed it? You hasten to shave it off, cutting the ear in the process, unable to stop the bleeding because of the anticoagulant effect of the daily dose of aspirin you take so that you can—the joke of it—live longer.

Others serve as truer mirrors that force upon us these abrupt realizations of our own decline. Can it be that my high school friend looks so terribly old? Wasn't he a year behind me? The theme is treated in exquisite detail by Proust in the last volume of his magnum opus, and much earlier and briefer by Seneca who, when seeing an old slave at the entrance to one of his estates he had not visited in years, asks the bailiff

the identity of the “broken-down dotard.” The slave answers: “Don’t you know me, sir? I am Felicio; you used to bring me little images. My father was Philositus the steward, and I am your pet slave.” Seneca has no defense against the truth that that pet slave represents.

The shame of such self-flattering blindness. Shame seems to crop up in everything I write (shame is by and large a good thing; it helps keep us moral, honorable, and socialized): humiliation, fears of exposure, the anxieties that attend the simplest interactions—muffing a routine handshake—or the torment of replaying those interactions afterward. Honor is always at stake and always being lost or threatened in the commonest of interactions. And with honor and its discontents come revenge, or fantasies of it, at least when it is someone else who has made a fool out of you, rather than your making one of yourself all on your own. But what revenges can there be at my age? What honor? Honors, should there be any, should not be confused with honor. Honors come in the form of plaques and awards and retirement dinners; honor comes in the form of others envying you.

Fishing for Compliments

At the end of one’s career one is asked to give talks on topics one wrote about fifteen or twenty years earlier. To prepare, I reread my past writing on the theme, hoping to reawaken, or to ram back in, the knowledge I had back then. Rereading one’s own work is a fraught experience. I lose either way: if I feel a surge of pride—“Wow, Miller, the muse was really singing when you wrote this”—no more than two seconds into indulging a fantasy of posthumous glory or even of belated present acclaim, my daydream crashes into the sea before the oxygen masks can drop down. Thus chastened, should I reexamine the work and conclude yet again that it is verifiably inspired and ever so unjustly ignored, then I despair that I could write anything approaching it today. I cannot remember that I ever knew the things I was talking about in that book. Wherever did I come up with that example to make my point? I would not even know where to look to find it now, even with the Google crutch, available now but not then.

More frequently, however, my reaction is this: no pride at all, just a chastening recognition of superficiality. I hope no one has read it, a hope that has pretty much been fulfilled, unlike most hopes. Presumably the dean hadn't; all he cared about was that it got published. This second reaction rings truer than the one celebrating my own genius. Negative self-judgments, because they must overcome our tendency to self-flatter, are likely to be more reliable than positive ones. Or as La Rochefoucauld put it: "Our enemies get closer to the truth in their judgment of us than we get ourselves."

Like that shop window that forced upon me a moment of painful truth, so too surprise attacks of painful truth occur in one's professional life. One reads the work of some fellow medievalists—friends, in fact—and its excellence reveals to you with painful clarity your own shortcomings, your corner cutting, your lack of gravitas: gravitas bearing not the sense of dull pomposity but rather an enviable refusal on your friends' part to dishonor their subject matter by making themselves, their anxieties about their relationship to it, even minutely their theme. They are real scholars, needing no genre mixing to provide a defense against failure by claiming to be playing a game halfway between essayist and historian—a law professor to historians, a historian to law professors, a half-baked moral psychologist to both, a jack of a middling number of trades to flit among so that you can always claim, when challenged, that you are not really in *that* field.

You do not, however, completely trust such negative judgments, either, for you surely do not believe them with all thine heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy might, in the idiom of Deuteronomy. These painful self-castigations, like the painful knowledge of the shop window, decay quickly or are shunted aside again and again. Merely to state them, to publicize them, is to fish for a compliment, to seek reassurances, even to display confidence. But should the fished-for compliment not be granted, if the begged-for reassurance is not proffered? Then this essay will have run afoul of the imitative fallacy, which holds that you should not be boring when writing about boredom or stupid when writing about stupidity. If one has lost it, one should not write about losing it. You do not want the proof of your fears showing up in the pudding. But

who am I to taste the pudding and pass on its quality? Old age has deprived my sense of taste of its nuance.

Yet this half-posed self-abnegation I have been indulging for the last few pages is more than a vulgar fishing expedition. It is also meant to work some magic. By claiming more decay than may have actually set in, or by owning up to what has set in, I hope to ward off more, and perhaps reclaim some ground already lost. The gods will reward my self-flagellation, the modest stripes of blood on my back, for not presuming on their beneficence. By counting chickens of negative value before they hatch, you expect to trick the gods into treating you better than it is certain they would had you counted unhatched chickens of positive value, in which case you can rest assured they would take a hostile interest in your presumption and kill the chicks or smash the eggs.

Can You Recall What You Had for Dinner, Cronus?

A competently socialized person knows that a welcome has a half-life; he senses when to leave, graciously saving the host from having to hint that it is time to do so. The adept actor anticipates a hint before it needs to be given. But we make mistakes sometimes and misread the situation. It is one thing to misread by ten minutes when we should have left a dinner party, and quite another to misread by ten years when we should have left the job, or by thirty years when we should have left off breathing. Since age takes its toll on our perceptual acumen, we may lose the capacity to discern even the heaviest-handed of hints, nor are we in any mood to take the hints we do perceive. Instead of taking our leave, we mobilize politically and demand third and fourth helpings, to be put up for the night too, thirty more years of nights, our bodies still insisting on staying long after our minds have lost the ability to know we have put our hosts in the poorhouse.

To hell with taking polite leave: there are more of us merry old souls than ever before, and we vote, which the young, whom we fleece, are less likely to do, and they will be outnumbered even if they do show up at the polls, mightily armed as we are with obedient mortality tables. The withered hands of the old are now rather more powerful than they were in ear-

lier times; it does not take much strength to feed a ballot into a voting machine, or to send in an absentee one if your arthritis is acting up.

As Western populations age, the costs of maintaining the old could justly activate in the young an image of so many Cronuses and Saturns devouring their offspring. (The myth or truth of the cannibalistic old is of long standing.) The riotous and stoned youths of the sixties, now in our sixties, who did much to pave the way for our no-gratification-left-behind culture, take to this mythic role with no shame, cramming our craw with everything in sight, not caring that it is chunks of our children and grandchildren that are the tenderest meat on our well-presented plate.

Me, Cronus? Occasionally I flatter myself that I am earning my keep, contributing more than I am consuming. And unlike those football players and boxers who do not know when to quit, professors like me cannot be cut. Tenure and age-discrimination laws let us keep working, which somehow does not seem the right word. Besides, there are always a couple of lazy colleagues whose real contribution to the enterprise is to make less lazy ones feel that we deliver value for the price. Never mind that my keep would fund four entry-level scholars in history or anthropology who are now unemployed: I still have kids of my own to feed, though I might be feeding them with someone else's. Self-deception and wishful thinking, looking on the bright side in a self-interested way, keep us conveniently colorblind to our real value, seeing black when the ink is red. Or simply not caring if it is red when we see it.

What of my clearly decaying scholarly capacities? Of being unable to continue learning or, if able, then unable to retain what I have recently learned? I can't even reliably come up with words like *refrigerator* or *kitty litter* and must endure my wife's hand gesture of irritated contempt to "get on with it." Can I ever get lost in a book again without my mind wandering? I have always been suspicious of those parents who claim that their dull, normal, and badly behaved children are really geniuses suffering from attention deficit disorder and need to be dosed with Ritalin. But now it seems, in some kind of poetic justice, that I have come down with ADD, the only difference being that I really do have it. My doctor actually prescribed Ritalin for me, which, as it turned out, my health insurance

refused to cover for anyone over eighteen. Not willing to pay the unsubsidized price, my avarice, itself an attribute of old age, has kept me Ritalin-free and my mind wandering.

Everything distracts me. Being interested in something has become unmoored from my ability to attend to it. Ambient noise, intrusive trivial thoughts, e-mail, stock prices, Green Bay Packer blogs variously and predictably plague me. Ambient quiet is distracting too and sent me to the Internet to buy a white noise machine. I interrupted the writing of this paragraph to play a game of solitaire, and then when I lost, I allowed myself to play until I won, and then one more in case I won two in a row, and then I kept on until I won two in a row. Says the ancient rabbinical *Pirkei Avot: The Ethics of the Fathers*, written some eighteen hundred years ago: "If a man is walking by the way and is studying and then interrupts his study and exclaims: 'How beautiful is this tree? How beautiful is this plowed furrow?' Scripture considers that it is to be regarded as if he has forfeited his life (or as if he bears guilt for his soul)." If the beauties of nature cannot justify distraction, what of solitaire? My offense is (*as if*) capital; if only I could remember which circle of hell awaits me. My will—an element of my name, no less—never strong to begin with, has become weaker. The "I am" that remains in *Will-iam* is thus a ghost of its former self. If William James is right, and I find that he usually is, then I am in trouble: "*The essential achievement of the will, in short, when it is most 'voluntary,' is to attend to a difficult object and hold it fast before the mind.*"

Has Nemesis gotten even with me for the contempt I did not quite disguise for the dead wood of twenty years ago by making me petrified wood in the eyes of my younger colleagues? You see them, don't you, giving signals that they want to break off the conversation you are holding them to almost out of spite, but desperately too, telling them, *Oh, just one more thing*, but talking faster as a concession to your perceiving in some primitive part of your brain that you are boring them silly, which they can perceive that you can perceive and so on in an infinite regress. You even find yourself following them down the hall as they head for the hills, still chattering at them, self-destructively unable to break off.

Blanking

There is no small amount of self-flattery in the lament of losing it: it claims you once had it to lose. Have you inflated your own past abilities? Complaining about how much "it" you have lost is a claim to a reasonably worthy past, and in your attempt to claim such former heights, even if you acknowledge your descent, you are sneaking in a claim to being still plenty high in absolute terms.

But unless you are one of those insufferable souls with self-esteem of such quality that no disconfirming evidence, no matter how devastating, can dent it, or unless you are already well embarked on dementia, these delusions about our minds are harder to maintain than the falsehoods we maintain about our appearance. You get caught once too often having forgotten things that are shameful for someone in your field not to have at your beckon. You fear too that you may be pretending to have once known it, that in fact you have forgotten nothing. Claiming forgetfulness is a way, pathetic as it is, of saving face. Where once you could blame things on drink, you now blame them on inevitable decline, on having sampled a few sips of the River Lethe. (Drink, whether from rivers or bottles, figures in many myths of memory and forgetfulness.) In the questioning after a public lecture, you find yourself unable to deny that the questioner is thinking better about your subject than you are. You tell yourself: At least I am still capable of shame. I can still recognize when someone is a whole lot sharper than I am. How many clowns in my racket can be skewered by a questioner's comments and not even know they were shown up for frauds and fools? But that ungenerous thought, despite its truth, dares the gods to make me one of them, if they have not done so already without my knowledge.

Being bested, even on your own turf, happened when you were younger too; big deal, that is part of learning. The shame it triggered spurred you to learn more, to do better. But when it starts to happen more frequently than is seemly, the earth beneath you no longer seems so firm, and your confidence starts to wane. You find yourself stuttering, losing track of your train of thought, just plain blanking.

A runner or a swimmer can prove exactly how much his abilities have decayed; so too there are ways of measuring the

decay of mental abilities, even if not quite stopwatch accurate. Things just do not happen as quickly in my brain as they once did. Always a slow reader, I could count on about thirty pages an hour for a novel I was not distracted from. Now it is twenty-five if I can stay focused, but the distractions are more frequent too, so that the real rate is closer to fifteen to twenty pages. I have to look up Old Norse and Old English words that twenty years ago I did not. I cannot add, subtract, divide, or multiply numbers without writing them down, something that used not to be the case. Just the other day I struggled figuring out the crew size of a Venetian transport in the Fourth Crusade when the book I was reading claimed that the two hundred Venetian ships requisitioned would need a crew of twenty-seven thousand to man them. This sounded high and I figured it must have mistakenly included the troops, but I needed a pen and paper to write out $27,000/200$ and then cancel out the zeroes to figure out the average per ship. I cannot remember the scholarship I have dutifully read within the past two weeks, let alone two months ago. Though most of it was eminently forgettable, I also cannot recall the most gruesomely lurid of accounts in a medieval chronicle that I did not think I would need to take notes on because I could trust myself never to forget something that perversely entertaining.

The slowing down seems to mimic in many respects the mechanics of conversing in a foreign language, one that you are not able to think in and so must translate in a race against time into English what your interlocutor is saying to you in French so that you can respond. I now find myself conscious that I am translating English into itself before I understand what is being said. By the time I have parsed the first part of the speaker's sentence, I have already missed the next part. Maybe it is not my memory that is at fault, but rather that the processing speed of all my mental functions is slowing down. You feel every couple of minutes that you got plunked down in medias res, in the middle of things, yet again, wondering what had happened and is happening. It is as if I were driving through an infinitely long school crossing zone in which I am the only one obeying the speed limit.

Worse still, I cannot remember what I have written, whether perhaps I have not published this very paragraph somewhere else. Self-plagiarism does explain the extraordi-

nary productivity of a few well-known academics; why should I be any different? Didn't I already say that in my *Faking It* book?

I just stopped typing and started to get out of my chair because I had formed the intention to . . . I forgot what I was getting up to do. Was I going to check *Faking It*? Then why would I have started to get up since I have a searchable version on my hard drive? Was I going to look up a word in the Latin dictionary? If I were, the thought that I might have been thus embarked does not prompt a rediscovery of the intention. I am certain that I did form an intention. That much I know. There is some good evidence. I made small initiatory movements to carry it out—I stopped typing, I started from my chair, and I am consumed with a panicky sense of being stuck in a satanically inverted “Amazing Grace”: I once was found but now I'm lost; I could see but now I'm blind.

This total loss of an intention is more unsettling than the more frequent failures that kick in a little later in the unfolding of an intentional action you are already well in the midst of. When that happens, I know there was a word I meant to look up or a book I meant to pull from the shelf, but I have forgotten which word or which book. Those things usually come back to me eventually, or so I think. This sort of lapse seems to be happening more often, too, and I now consider them of minor moment if I recover the goal within a few seconds, successfully pulling Eurydice back from oblivion. At least in these kinds of forgetting I know the rough domain of my intention: some word or some book. But this time the blank is blanker, for I have no clue what I roughly intended at all, only that I intended something.

This kind of failure is not like those dully common failures of forward memory that seem more frequent among teenagers than among sexagenarians: forgetting to discharge a duty or to do a chore that must be fulfilled sometime in the near future. My youngest son used to forget to walk the neighbor's dog, though it was his job to do so daily, more often than I forget a doctor's appointment. But I did forget to be in my office for my office hours last week. It seems that as I head for the infancy of old age I have already reached the irresponsible teenage level on my return trip back to diapers.

I suppose I can take some consolation from these unnerving

failures to remember an intention within seconds of forming it that I am hyperaware of the blank, that it torments me. Were the erasure so complete as to keep me blithely unaware that I had even formed an intention in the first place, I would be embarked on Herr Alzheimer's ship of fools. Maybe, though, horrifically, I never had an intention but only the illusion of one, the illusion taking the form of the panicky sensation of blanking. I cannot accept that or I would be in chains on the lordly lofts of Bedlam. What in hell did I get up to do? I have not a clue, and it never came back to me either. But then I cannot be certain that it did not come back, only that if it did, I did not recognize it as the intention that I had lost.

These kinds of failures share a family resemblance with another kind of failure: blanking on names or words. This seems to be a special curse for sexagenarian teachers who fail to find the names of even the most intelligent and attractive of their students at moments when it is apparent to them and everyone else that you blanked. As William James pointed out, ever so perfectly, that blank is not just a formless blank. It has a shape: "a sort of wraith of the name is [in the gap], beckoning us in a given direction, making us at moments tingle with the sense of our closeness, and then letting us sink back without the longed-for term." Much the same with the wraith of a lost intention. A small vertigo sets in. With a name or a noun you cannot come up with, you might run through the alphabet hoping that with the first letter the rest will fill itself out. This may work for a lost word, but not for recovering that fleeting intention that just slipped through the widening cracks in my consciousness.

Nor is the story just one of forgetfulness triumphing over memory. The productive capacity to forget is decaying too. Forgetting comes in more than a few flavors, some of them quite beneficent, like the ability to inhibit memories irrelevant to the task at hand that intrude and disrupt it, or the ability to forget insults or disses, or hated songs. For those things my memory is acuter than it ever was. It helps explain my late-onset ADD.

Q.E.D.

January 13, 2010: I am defending to a colleague the wisdom of the police rounding up the usual suspects.

Me: Claude Rains was being more than a mere cynic, which of course he was also being, when he said “round up the usual suspects” because the usual suspects were not innocent but the known criminals of whatever the city was, Tangiers, Marrakech, I forget which.

Colleague: Casablanca.

Me: I am going to go shoot myself.

and speculative magazines and anthologies, from *Alaska Quarterly Review* to *Weird Tales*. She's published a short story collection and two novels, with a third novel, *The Made-up Man*, appearing this fall, and another short story collection in 2013.

JANET KAUFFMAN taught at Eastern Michigan University for many years and now works on water quality issues and sustainable agriculture. She has published nine books of fiction, nonfiction, and poetry, most recently *Trespassing: Dirt Stories & Field Notes* (Wayne State University Press) on the factory farm crisis in her watershed.

THOMAS LYNCH's most recent books include *Apparition & Late Fictions* (stories) and *Walking Papers* (poems), both published in 2010 by W. W. Norton. Carnegie Mellon Classic Contemporaries series just reissued *Skating with Heather Grace* (poems, Knopf 1987), and *The Sin-Eater: A Breviary* (poems) will be published in September. He is at work on a longer fiction.

JEFFREY MEYERS, a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature, has recently published *Samuel Johnson: The Struggle* (2008), *The Genius and the Goddess: Arthur Miller and Marilyn Monroe* (2009), *George Orwell: Life and Art* (2010)—his fifth work on Orwell—and *John Huston: Courage and Art* (2011). Thirty of his books have been translated into fourteen languages and seven alphabets and published on six continents.

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The three volumes of *Papiers collés* (Gallimard, 1960, 1973, 1978) by GEORGES PERROS (1923–1978) have long enjoyed a cult status among French readers (and especially writers). Literally, “papiers collés” refers to “glued bits or scraps of paper” forming a collage. Perros also puns on the word “papier,” which alludes here to the reviews and personal essays