



1991

ELLIPSIS



Ellipsis

Volume 19

Spring 1991

University of
New Orleans

CREDITS

EXECUTIVE EDITORS: Pablo Lopez and Tania Nyman

FACULTY ADVISOR: Kay Murphy

ART EDITOR: Allison Clouate

FICTION EDITOR: Brian Hannon

ASSISTANT FICTION EDITOR: Nital Patel

FICTION READERS: James L. Butler, III.
Gerald Ladmirault
Arthur J. Warner, Jr.

NON-FICTION EDITOR: Christopher A. Healy

ASSISTANT NON-FICTION EDITOR: Elizabeth Feltey

NON-FICTION READERS: Beatrice Calvert
Nolan Marchand

POETRY EDITORS: Dawn Loustau
Stephen Thurber
Dennis Tyler

POETRY READERS: Allison Clouate
Kara Martinez
Richard Mulcahy

SPECIAL THANKS to the DRIFTWOOD on whom we depend for equipment and space; to numerous members of the "Wood," (particularly Amanda Hawxhurst and Ian Hawxhurst); the LEARNING RESOURCE CENTER (especially Bill Middleton and Sean Sperry); and to all who dedicated time, energy, and submissions to the *Ellipsis*.

A PATAPHORICAL NOTE

In every piece of writing there comes a point at which the revision process ends. That is when words have stopped being simply words—nouns and verbs and prepositions on a page—and have become, instead, machine parts. Then, to change anything at all is to make it ring five o' clock at every hour, or worse, let its sweet face linger on the watchmaker's countertop, peering through a dusty screen, like the child who rubs off the window frost to see the empty blacktop packed with snow.

Pablo Lopez

CONTENTS

Dedication to Raeburn Miller

Teacher-Poet	Raeburn Miller11
Peptides	Raeburn Miller . . . 13
Regarding a Certain Omission	Maxine Cassin . . . 14
Lines for an Obstinate Poet	John Gery15
Ahasuerus	Raeburn Miller . . . 16
Reading Letters	Raeburn Miller . . . 17
On Being Asked Whether I Have Prayed in the Last Five Years	Raeburn Miller . . .18
Z.M.C., Etc.	Raeburn Miller . . . 19
Planning Ahead	Raeburn Miller . . . 20
Poets and Their Bibliographies	Raeburn Miller21
Artwork: Derek Demourelle	 22
Japanese Magnolias	Kay Moses 23
Geography	Nital Patel 24
Artwork: Mike S. Henry	28
Andre Breton and the Origins of Surrealist Thought	Brian Hannon . . . 29
Artwork: Keith A. Perelli	 36
Closet 'Pataphysics	"Pablito" Lopez . . 37
The Source of the Siamese— dreaming Cat	Dennis Tyler45
Egyptian Rat Screw	Donna Thompson....46
Artwork: Keith A. Perelli	46
The Women	Julia Johnson 47
An Interview with Peter Cooley	Dawn Loustaunau 48
Goodwill Comes Friday	Betty C. Lilley 55
One Bird Lane	James T. Davis, Jr. . 67
Artwork: Doug MacCash	 68



CLOSET 'PATAPHYSICS

Pablo Lopez

For the Bodhissatva ("won't you take me by the hand")

The stranger leaned forward.

"You're back."

Gold-rimmed spectacles caught the light here and there, like butterflies trapped in nets. Walsh could make out the face of a man in his late fifties. Everything about him appeared ordinary in every respect. He could blend, Walsh thought, imperceptibly into any crowd. And yet there was something essentially sad about him; every gesture left one with the impression of great loss, like toy trucks whose red paint outlasts childhood, or the wedding pictures that sit on Widow Grave's bureau beside brass candlesticks.

"Hugged-Too-Late's the name," the stranger said with a brisk handshake. "Doctor Hugged-Too-Late."

"Hugged-Too-Late?"

Walsh peered cautiously through the darkness, where the doctor, crouched, peered back. Outside, the footsteps of the green army swept past.

Walsh had found the closet down an adjoining hallway, thirty feet or so from his cell at Babylon Sisters, Inc. Being small and quick, he had managed to squeeze inside the tiny door (imperceptibly buried in the corridor wall) before his pursuers turned the corner. Collapsed hangers and clothing were draped around them both as they sat at opposite ends of the little room, their knees doubled up and heads bent.

"I'm Walsh," said Walsh, out of breath.

The racket of tripping black boots and colliding knives began to recede, like scarves disappearing up a sleeve.

Hugged-Too-Late said:

"You were saying?"

Walsh frowned.

"But I've just come."

"Horribird, boy! Why fiddle with technicalities? It's entirely possible that you've been here before. In fact, haven't you been lecturing at me for some time? Maybe you've been quite chatty, talking my ear off for an hour, or perhaps you've just sat there, trembling all over, white as an egg, as you are now. Perhaps you have never been here at all—you avoid this closet and carry on our conversation just the same, or you creep in here only at night and sit for hours, ignoring my company, quiet as a fish."

Walsh shook his head.

"I don't think so."

"If you would only tell me your reason for being here it might clear up our misunderstanding. I am not an observant man by nature. Still, I can't help but notice that you are whining under your breath and grinding your teeth—understandably, out of fatigue and terror—that your stomach is growling and that your clothes are ripped (three stitches in the seam of the crotch, the shirt pocket torn and a hole in the left armpit). Really I'm happy you came along to relieve the tedium, even if you do smell badly, and need to brush your teeth. Forgive me. It is a small closet."

Walsh (who was becoming accustomed to surprises) said:

"What about you? Why are you here?"

"Hiding from the Cabbage Cutters—why else?"

"Cabbage Cutters?"

Hugged-Too-Late's gold cufflinks twinkled.

"Surely you caught a glimpse or two of them at your heels."

"But I was told there were no guards on this asteroid."

"There aren't. The Cabbage Cutters are the private guard of Good King Richard. He must be doing a routine inspection of the premises."

"Richard?" Walsh gasped. "Then we're doomed."

"Well, boy, this is a reasonably safe place, except that here your safety depends, not on the change of the guard as in most places, but upon the change of clothes—a simpler system, I assure you, but indescribably harder to chart."

"But we have to go outside sooner or later."

"Not to worry."

"You have a plan?"

"No. This door locks from the inside."

Walsh tried the knob, shook the door, tried it again, then said:

"You mean—"

"I mean that we have a lot of time on our hands. And you still haven't told me why you were running."

Walsh, hesitantly at first, told the Doctor everything that had happened: his appearance in the bank, arrest, interrogation, and subsequent escape.

Every so often Hugged-Too-Late would mutter: "Astounding." "Unique." "Astronomical." Or, merely: "Horribird."

When Walsh had finished his story, H-T-L shook his head.

"A horribirdinous tale, dear boy!"

"And now I'll never get home."

"What? Nonsense!"

"What makes you so confident?"

H-T-L leaned forward with a suspicious expression.

"Could it be you haven't heard?"

Walsh frowned.

"Our Science, boy!"

"Science?" said Walsh.

H-T-L looked aghast.

"Why, The Science—that armrest of the intellect, that great revolving door: 'pataphysics!'"

"Metaphysics?"

"'PATAPHYSICS: that which extends as far beyond metaphysics as metaphysics extends beyond physics.'"

"What does your Science have to do with me?"

"Everything. Especially if you plan on making it out of this closet with your brain."

"My brain?"

"Have you forgotten? That Scald Street Spectacle, that wondrous affair of flying hair—the disembraining machine!" Walsh gripped his head.

"I've told you—I'm not a criminal."

Hugg snickered.

"Maybe the Babylon Sisters will see it that way."

"Their machine can't be that horrible. can it?"

"Worse, I'm afraid. Cleaner than the tomahawk, and—I'll admit—less painful than the pig-pinching machine, but altogether more horrible than either. So horrible there's no describing it in conversation."

"Then it really is hopeless."

"Not with the aid of our Science."

"Oh?"

"Pataphysics is a science which we have invented, and for which a crying need has generally been felt."

"I haven't been crying about it," said Walsh. He grabbed the Doctor's beautifully starched collar, which crumpled like a satin rose. "You said you would help me."

"And I am!"

"All I want is to return home. Can your Science swing that?"

"Have no fear!" said Hugged-Too-Late, removing Walsh's hand and brushing out the damage. "Pataphysics is the science of imaginary solutions."

"I would prefer real solutions."

"Reality is for the mediocre. It's best not to fool with it when one has discovered that there are no real ways out."

"Sounds optimistic. But what else have I got to go on?"

H-T-L shrugged.

"Only that Too-Far Toenail Clipper, that Fatal Papercut, that Bad Rug-burn—"

"Explain your 'pataphysics," Walsh said.

"Haven't I already?"

"But your definition makes no sense. After all, if metaphysics, simply defined, is 'that which extends beyond physics,' then what's the sense is making up a term for 'that which extends beyond that which extends beyond physics'? That makes about as much sense as saying 'further than far away'."

"You've misunderstood. Let us take our Science and apply it to something less general—language."

"Proceed—but don't protract."

"Let us take as our physical basis a phrase or image described in a work of fiction. Something simple, unimpeachable in itself. *The moon rose over the sea*. We label that statement physical. For though a literary work may be a lying little devil in the sum of its parts, we cannot deny that the words on the page say what they say, even if that statement is later cast in doubt."

"Continue."

"Metaphor, on the other hand, is a metaphysical device. *The yellow eye rose over the sea*. Although the moon (physical) is still implicit in context, an eye now temporarily occupies its narrative space. But the moon remains the dominant element, the eye a precipitate of the physical, intended to embellish it. Still with me?"

"Yes."

"We will allow then, for the sake of our Mr. Walsh's education, the coinage of a simple term: the pataphor. What if our phrase were to read: *The yellow eye rose over the sea: in time, a tear fell, beading along a whisker to fall into the blue porcelain dish*. Having taken the precipitate of our physical object seriously (the eye given form), we have delivered that precipitate into a new context where the precipitate becomes the physical. The moment of pataphor occurs when the metaphor has become so embellished it no longer relates to that which it was meant to embellish itself.

"Ergo:

"PATAPHOR: that which occurs when a lizard's tail grows so long it breaks off and grows a new lizard."

At this Walsh tried to stand, hitting his head on the overhead shelf.

"Ow! I see now: as far from metaphysics as metaphysics extends beyond physics. Imagination based on imagination!"

"Bravo!" cried Hugged-Too-Late, clapping Walsh on the back. "Transformation is the stethoscope of 'patascience!'"

"Let's do some pataphors, then."

"Very well. First we need a dramatic situation. Let us say,

for the sake of pataphor, Tom and Alice are typical high school Freshmen, who happen to have crushes on one another. Now suppose I say: *Tom and Alice stood side by side in the lunch line*."

Walsh thought a moment, then said:

"Then I would say, metaphorically: *Tom and Alice stood side by side in the lunch line, stiff as two pieces on a chessboard*."

H-T-L nodded.

"And I: *Tom took a step closer on the board and made a date for Saturday, checkmating. Rudy was furious at losing to Margaret so easily and dumped the board on the rose-colored quilt, stomping downstairs*."

Walsh laughed.

H-T-L said:

"You laugh, but it's a sad game we're playing. After all, Rudy and Margaret are but the stuff of pataphor. Everything about them (their wooden chessboard with the nicks on the pieces, Granny's faded quilt, the carpeted stairs of their suburban bungalow) bear no relation whatsoever to our date-makers at Green Candle High. Whether Tom and Alice fall in love or fall asleep, we will never know Rudy's last name and, indeed, have no reason to care."

Walsh smiled.

"So who won the game?"

H-T-L shrugged.

"Tom won."

"Yes—but unfortunately, only in pataphor."

"No, in metaphor. In reality, the game (love) is in progress. In pataphor, Rudy lost."

Walsh leaned back into the hangers, which tinkled like glass wind-chimes.

"Let's try another."

"Very well," said Hugged-Too-Late. "Your turn."

"*The sweaters are hanging in the closet*," Walsh said.

H-T-L said: "*The sweaters are hanging in the closet, their profiles the silhouettes of elephants*."

"*The sweaters are hanging in the closet, their profiles the silhouettes of elephants at Fort Worth Zoo before Mr. Bigby's five o' clock show*."

"Not bad," said H-T-L. "But I pity our poor Bigby, begat of shawls and sweaters."

"You sound disappointed. What were you expecting when you thought of elephants?"

"A circus. I love the circus."

"More?"

"One more," said Hugged-Too-Late.

"I say: *My heart skips a beat*."

"And I: *Your heart skips like a checker*."

"My heart skips a beat like a checker, landing at the end of the board. King me."

"More board games. A game of checkers begun in the chest, terminating in metaphor. (The second checker was pataphorical.)"

"So the pataphor creates its own context."

H-T-L nodded.

"But what does this have to do with me?"

"You have to understand another concept of 'pataphysics first."

"Pataphysics will examine the laws governing exceptions and will explain the universe supplementary to this one; or, less ambitiously, will describe a universe which can be seen—and which perhaps should be seen—in place of the traditional one, those laws that are supposed to have been discovered in the traditional universe being only correlations of exceptions, albeit more frequent ones, but in any case accidental data which, reduced to the status of unexceptional exceptions, possess not even the virtue of singularity."

"How do you intend to explain this one? More pataphors?"

"Not this time. Apply what I've just said to your situation! Can you deny that those laws we have supposedly discovered in this universe are but correlations of exceptions?"

"I don't understand."

"You will. For it now bequeaths us to speak on the agony of the trapeze artist."

"So we've come to our circus at last. And I thought we were going to discuss laws."

"But we are. It is appropriate to liken our argument to a trapeze artist. Let us see him, in our mind's eye, as he swings from bar to bar over the center ring. The circus tent represents our universe, and the people in the crowd—the fat lady with the ice-cream cone, the young couple with their baby (three months and teething), the schoolchildren with their teacher—represent mortal mankind."

"I'm game."

"Good. Then let us ask our trapeze artist to step to the landing and play a part in our little spectacle."

H-T-L executed a little bow and began afresh:

"Here on earth, we are witness to a variety of phenomena, some explainable by science, some not so explainable. Mediocre, indulgent scientists tell us that our world is based on laws that, by their definition, have no exceptions. If this is so, however, many things remain unexplained. For instance, if we put credence in a universe based on laws, there is no way to account for your presence here."

"But I am here."

"Precisely. In a universe of laws the trapeze artist represents the law and must always catch the next trapeze. He has no safety net. If he falls once the show is over. All it takes is one exception to one law to prove decisively that the very foundations of that system are flawed. Having happened to you, you can no longer believe in such a system."

Walsh looked glum.

"So what should I believe in?"

"How much more appropriate to see our universe not as something that contains laws but as a place where anything at all can happen. Everything that occurs on earth is exceptional, a freak accident—gravity, matter and energy, consciousness—only some exceptions are more common than others, a fact that doesn't speak much for them, since, at base, they aren't even exceptional exceptions! In this version of the world the trapeze artist always misses—plans on missing, is expected to miss. Every time he falls into the net his presence is recognized here on earth by showers of oohs and ahhs. Every apple that drops is another blown stunt. We see a lot of our man Gravity, and no wonder: he is a lousy flyer. He's so bad, in fact, we've mistaken his clumsiness for skill."

"So why am I here?"

"I was getting to that. The phenomena we never see are the most skillful. The ones that make lettuce grow hair, bowling balls lose holes and turn suitcases green. They pass peacefully above our heads, falling to earth once every million years, perhaps even more rarely. My guess is that one of these has just landed, right in your birthday cake, one of these exceptional exceptions—and will hopefully return to obscurity soon. It is also possible that your life until now has been a mistake—a good flyer having a bad stretch, who, for the first time since your birth, is in better form. In that case you were meant to be here all along. Of course, there is also the possibility that no new phenomena have fallen, and your trapeze artist remains in poor form as always. Another, stronger and better flyer has only entered the show and for the time being is catching yours by the legs. If that is the case you want to get that second flyer out of the picture."

Walsh sunk a few inches.

"If what you say is true—if my life until now has been maintained by an accident—it could be a long time before that accident is reinstated."

"Forever, most likely," said Hugged-Too-Late. "For all practical purposes, at least."

Walsh's ears turned red.

"You haven't helped me—only made me feel worse!"

"Read the writing on the proverbial wall, boy! Have you

forgotten so quickly? Imaginary solutions! Isn't that what we've been talking about? Remember, above all, 'pataphysics will study the laws governing exceptions. As of this moment we must do precisely that: research exceptional phenomena, trying to discover which phenomena it was that sustained your former existence and, now that it has failed (or something greater succeeded) discover what we can do to set things right."

"But how are we supposed to study these exceptions? And what about these imaginary solutions? What if your trapeze artist has simply gotten tired of flying? And how are we supposed to get out of this closet! Imagine our way?"

"Don't be absurd!" scoffed the Hugg. "For physical problems we shall employ physical solutions. Pataphysicians always come equipped. And it just so happens that I have remembered to bring—by means of our Science of 'pataphysics—" he took something from a back pocket: "a hairpin! Now watch as I demonstrate how this instrument greatly facilitates the opening of doors."

And with that, he did.

THE SOURCE OF THE SIAMESE - DREAMING CAT

If at this moment,
Nothing lacking in spirit or ferocity,
Everything became a vain wish,
Maybe then it would quit raining.
It is a dark, cliched night, all
the rhymes are locked up tight, and the rhythm's
too sleepy to care. The TV's snowing.
It is the right time for this kind of non-action.

The night is like a cat,
Always digging up forgotten associations,
Loafing exactly where you don't want it to be,
A constant reminder that you're not really
In control. This string of events is always
so close to the end, and the cat knows this.
Like the night, it knows the future, and
sends the rain to mock you, a quiet sound
To throb at the base of your neck.
This has always been the source of dreams -
That mystical illusion of your left hand
better to be ignored. But not the night.
The night does not forget insults so easily.
It is this that makes it rain.

Dennis Tyler