

“For it is just this question of pain that parts us.”²³

In a world full of danger, to be a potentially seeable object is to be constantly exposed to danger. Self-consciousness, then, maybe the apprehensive awareness of oneself as potentially exposed to danger by the simple fact of being visible to others. The obvious defense against such a danger is to make oneself invisible in one way or another. –R. D. Laing, M.D.²⁴

It was an odd summer. No longer between semesters, rather between degrees, Jerry moved back into his bedroom. This was once his home, now smaller and older. He once shared the room with his brother, Stephen, who was three years older, recently married, a school teacher, now living outside of Atlanta. Jerry was no longer a college student and not yet a law school student. He returned the night before last with a duffle bag of clothes (mostly t-shirts and jeans) and a newly minted degree in British Literature. Jerry hadn't unpacked the duffle yet, avoiding the feeling of permanent residency. He preferred to see himself as a guest, drifting for the next three months before moving on to Vanderbilt. He didn't completely belong here anymore.

Neither, Mike nor Trisha, had any empty nest reaction when Jerry, their youngest, moved out of state for school. In fact, they embraced the change, falling comfortably back into their role once upon a time as a devout married couple, no longer a family of four. There was less rushing, more wine, comfort with their careers, and better sex. Nonetheless, they were both glad to see their son back home for the summer. They welcomed him and congratulated him once again on finishing his BA with cum laude distinction.

Jerry was no bother. He mostly spent his time held up alone in his room reading. Long, skinny legs would carry him daily down to the library. He could spend hours every morning wandering the shelves followed by more hours back up in his room devouring his finds.

Jerry would come down from his room now and again throughout the day to pick. He ate like a bird, opening the refrigerator, picking at cold food. It had always been like this, eating only cold food. Mike and Trisha still had their dinners in the dining room, cloth napkins laid out, with the table set for two. Trisha would leave a plate in the refrigerator for Jerry to pick at later.

Jerry's weight had been a constant source of conflict. There were arguments over it when he was a child refusing to eat. Trisha took Jerry once to Dr. Spencer, their family physician, who suggested vitamins and more patience Trisha's part. "He'll out grow it," Spencer reassured her. Jerry took his vitamins; Trisha stopped outright arguing with Jerry

²³ Well, H. G. (1896). *The Island of Dr. Moreau*. United Kingdom: Heinemann, Stone & Kimball.

²⁴ Laing, R. D. (1965). *The divided self: An existential study in sanity and madness*. New York: Penguin.

over food favoring a more passive approach. On Tuesday Trisha asked Jerry if there was anything in particular he wanted her to pick up from the supermarket on her way home from work.

“Coffee is okay, but I would also like some radishes and scallops.”

“...Coffee, radishes, and scallops?”

“Yes, I want round food.”

“Round?” Trisha asked with a smile.

“I believe our bodies better absorb round food. I need to start eating more round foods,” Jerry responded without acknowledging Trisha’s smile.

Trisha interpreted the dialog as her son’s odd way of asking her to back-off, stop bothering him about his dietary habits. Trisha did not press, nor did she buy radishes and scallops later that day.

Before the sun broke through the following day, Mike got out of bed. The cat was scratching at their bedroom door determined to get in and up on the bed. The bedroom was dark. Mike opened the door and notice light seeping out underneath Jerry’s closed door. Mike opened his door wider. He listened. Mumbling. He could hear Jerry mumbling something but couldn’t make out the words. Was he on the phone? Could there be a girlfriend? Singing along to a song masked by headphones? Mike cracked his door in case the cat had a change of mind, then he returned back to bed.

Later in the morning, before noon, Trisha called Mike at the office. “You have to get down to the library. It’s Jerry. Something is wrong! They’ll call the police if one of us doesn’t get down there right away.” Mike’s office was much closer to the library. He hurried.

A police car followed Mike into the library’s parking lot. A mother dropping off her daughter for Summer Book Camp overheard the commotion, taking matters into her own hands, and called the police herself. The police cruiser parked right out front in the fire lane. Jerry had to park in the back, but he jogged from his car to the lobby where he saw the officer now talking to one of the librarians standing at the front desk. She pointed at Mike. “That’s his father.”

Mike didn’t stop. He could hear Jerry on the far side of the library yelling. Jerry was backed up to wall length, ceiling to floor window overlooking a pond. Not moving from his position, rather, Jerry was shifting his weight from his right leg to the left, moving back and forth. He was holding both his hands out, fingers spread wide as if about to be attacked by a rabid dog. “Nobody is listening to me. Why won’t anybody listen to me!” Jerry ranted.

“I’m listening,” Mike said. “Tell me what is going on?”

“They’re changing all the words! The words are being changed!”

“What words?” Mike asked. He kept his eye fixed on his son but could feel someone, the police officer perhaps, had walked up behind him.

Now with both his hands, he pointed towards the librarians at the reservation desk, "They are back there changing all the words in the books. That's what they've been doing all this time." Jerry was no longer yelling, rather, his words came out in a desperate cry. Mike saw agony in Jerry's face. Torture. "They're changing all the words." Jerry was now pointing at open books sitting on the table feet away from him. "What a piece of work is man! How noble in reason! How infinite in faculty! In form and moving how express and admirable! In action how like an angel! In apprehension how like a god! The beauty of the world, the paragon of animals!" This is what it is suppose to say in Hamlet. But, they have changed it. See!"

"Is there a problem with drugs?" a voice said behind Mike's ear.

"No." Mike whispered back.

"Mental illness?"

"No," again said in a soft whisper.

"You need to get him to agree to go to the hospital with you, or I'll need to take him into custody," the officer said.

"Jerry, we'll get to the bottom of this. I promise. Together you and I will figure this all out. But, you have to listen to me. Can you do that?" Mike asked in a calm, soft, slow voice.

"But, they are changing...."

"If you come with me right now, we will figure this out. We can't figure this out here. We have to leave. Will you come with me?" Mike asked while holding his hand out to his son.

Jerry took his father's hand and the two began to walk through the library together. The children from Summer Book Camp watched from their seated position on the blue rug, sitting Indian style, they were no longer interested in Dr. Seuss. As they neared the exit, Jerry paused and began again to rant. "But, those cock suckers are back there changing all the words! I've discovered...."

"Jerry, we have to keep walking. I need for you to calmly tell me everything that you have learned. You have to tell me calmly, so I can better understand, what you have learned. Tell me everything."

They started walking again. Jerry started to explain, calmer now, how he first noticed H. G. Well's *The Island of Dr. Moreau* was being changed, morphed, from the original. The story was no longer told from the character Edward Prendick's point of view. Now Dr. Moreau was narrating the entire story. Facts had been changed. Mike did not interrupt, allowing Jerry to elaborate the entire ride to the hospital. The police car slowly followed behind.

Mike drove around to the back of the hospital where the Emergency Room was located. Both a man and a woman waited outside the ER bay doors where the ambulances

“Good.”

“Anything special happen today?”

“No, but Adam and I are going to get married soon.”

“Really?”

Joy held up her left hand to show her mother the engagement ring. The band fitted tight around her chubby little finger.

Carol stopped the car. They weren’t out of the supermarket parking lot yet. The car behind Carol stopped too, then drove around her Camry. She grabbed Joy’s hand raising it up to get a better look at the tiny rock adorning her daughter’s ring finger.

“My God! That’s a real diamond!”

Dr. John Fahey taught psychology at the university. His Thursday morning class had just ended, and he was now back in his office with his ass in his chair, a fresh mug of coffee steaming in his left hand, and boots on his desk reading the file he just received from the court. The header of the first document read: In the thirtieth Circuit Court, Division of Mental Health; The State vs. Joy Lejeune. The court was being asked to decide if Joy, now twenty-one years of age, required a legal guardian, if Joy was unable to make appropriate decisions, lacking competency to carry out the ongoing regulation of her life. The next document to follow in the report, was an order appointing the mother, Carol Lejeune as the emergency temporary guardian. The temporary order would stay in effect until the Judge made his final ruling on the matter of Joy’s competency. In the mean time, Carol had complete authority over Joy’s life: Where she could live, if she could sign her name to a check, travel, or consent to a medical procedure. The final document, Fahey reviewed was a court order appointing him as the forensic evaluator. He was required to evaluate Joy, write a psychological report, and render his professional opinion to the Judge.

Dr. Reid didn’t need directions. He had been to the Edward Sequin Rehabilitation Center many times to conduct competency evaluations. The lines between mental retardation and incompetency blur. The court was asking for a univocal response to an ambiguous set of life circumstances. Fahey’s job was to ensure his opinion was not influence by emotion, intuition, or bias.

“I’m having a difficult time with this whole thing,” Richard said to Dr. Fahey as he stood up from his sister’s love seat in Unit 204. Now a pediatric dentist, Richard was wearing green medical scrubs; he had taken off from work to observe the evaluation of his sister. Joy stayed both quiet and seated on the love seat. She felt like she was in some sort of serious trouble like the time she took her father’s keys off the counter, got into his car, backing it out of the closed garage.

would arrive. When seeing Mike's car, they began to wave to pull up straight to the bay. The police officer must have called ahead.

"Why are we here?" Jerry asked.

"We will get to the bottom of this. I promised you. Now, I need for you to trust me."

Mike and Jerry were greeted with kind smiles and softly spoken words.

"I'll take your keys and park the car for you," an orderly said wearing green scrubs. "I'm Lynda. Please, follow me," the woman requested.

They followed her to an examination room. Green curtains were drawn closed. For the first time, Jerry was quite, although quivering. Within just a couple of minutes, the curtain was opened.

"Good morning, I'm Dr. Montgomery, the on call psychiatrist. What seems to be the problem?"

Jerry's eyes widened. Adrenaline pulsed. He had taken a seat on the examination table, but now fell backwards catching himself with his left hand. He took a deep breath, face turning red, he held it in. Turning first to see if his father was still in the room, Jerry redirected his attention back at the doctor and with his exhale of wind words came shrieking out. "You're Dr. Moreau! You're going to vivisect²⁵ me!" Turning back towards his father screaming, "Don't let him cut me! Don't let him cut me!"

"I'm not Moreau. I'm Dr. Montgomery. There is no Dr. Moreau who works here at the hospital."

"He's not Moreau. I promise you. Please trust me. He's not Moreau," Mike tried to reassure his son. Jerry fell silent, now holding his terror close to his chest.

"Jerry, what if my nurse, Lynda, stayed with you for just a few minutes while your father and I spoke outside. Would that be okay?"

The two men took Jerry's silence to mean acceptance. Lynda came into the examination room as the father and psychiatrist stepped out.

"Your son is experiencing a paranoid psychotic episode. Has anything like this happened before?"

"No."

"Is he using drugs?"

"I'm almost certain he's never tried drugs, not even alcohol."

"How old is your son?" The doctor now asked.

"Twenty-one. He'll be Twenty-two in October."

"I'm going to suggest an injection of Haloperidol. If he is agreeable. That'll help and help quickly. Afterwards, we'll talk to see what the next step should be."

"Okay."

²⁵ A surgery done on a live organism for experimental purposes.

The two men returned back to the examination room. Lynda continued to stay as well. "Jerry, I believe you are sick; you have psychosis and need some medication. Do I have your permission to give you some medication, an antipsychotic?"

"No! No! I don't want you to change me into some form of beast! You can't cut me open and look inside! I'm not going to be part of your experiment! I want off this fucking island!"

"It's just medication," Dr. Montgomery responded.

"No. I won't let you cut open my mind, look inside, vivisect me!"

"Okay, okay," Montgomery said motioning to Mike to step outside the examination room again to speak.

"In the eyes of the law, Jerry is an adult. As long as he isn't showing signs of suicide or homicide risk, he has the right to refuse treatment. There is nothing I can do for him at the moment. There are professional ethics to be considered here. "

"But doctor, he thinks you're a character from a novel."

Mike and Jerry returned back to the house. Trisha left work early and was anxiously waiting the return of her two men. Upon seeing Jerry, Trisha's eyebrows immediately arched as her mouth turned down and opened some. Anguish. It wasn't so much his physical appearance as his affect. Jerry looked disheveled right from the core. Eyes darting to and fro, Jerry looked lost in his own living room. Jerry wasn't Jerry anymore, turning into an altogether different species.

"Oh, my God!"

"Trisha, for Jerry's sake everything is going to be fine."

"I need to go to my room. I need to check my books, make sure nothing has been changed. The words are still the way they all wrote them." Jerry again began to shift his weight from right leg to left.

"Okay. We'll check in on you shortly."

"The bastard did nothing? Nothing?" Trisha said only once Jerry had left the room.

"Something about professional ethics? He doesn't have the capacity to be unsupervised in a public library, but he can make an informed medical decision? Can you believe that bullshit! What are we going to do? He's really sick!"

"I called Dr. Spencer's office. He's at a conference today, but said he'll see Jerry first thing tomorrow morning. He'll practice medicine, not social philosophy."

"What do we do until then?"

"Valium. I'll give him one of my Valium; at least, it will help him sleep."

Trisha knocked on Jerry's door as she opened it with Mike following behind her. Jerry was crouched on the floor like a cat, toes, knees, and elbows on the floor, lurching

over a book frantically searching words. "Honey, I want you to take this medicine for me." Trisha held out her hand with the pill center in her palm."

"No."

"But, its round. Round medicine is good for you."

Jerry paused looking at his mother. Thinking. "Okay." Jerry stood up, took the medicine with the water Mike had brought up with him, then returned back to his cat-like stance peering over the book left open on the floor.

"Honey, would it be alright if I just sat here with you? I promise not to disturbed you."

"Can I let you know if I find any changes to the words, okay?"

"Sure, Honey." Trisha turned over to Mike."Let the two of us be alone for a while."

Mike gave a quick nod and left the room. Trisha sat on the corner of her son's bed watching him run his finger over every line of text. First his fingers ran from left to right followed by right to left for the next line of text working his way down each page. She examined the room. His duffel bag was sitting on the floor next to the closet unpacked. His bookshelf was all but empty. On the wall under the window books were stacked like one of the Great Pyramids of Egypt. A card had been positioned on the windowsill just above the literary pyramid. On the front of the card, Trisha could make out a picture of a graduation cap tossed in the air. She continued to watch her son for the hour it took the Valium to nestle into Jerry's system and sleep to take over. Now asleep on the floor, Trisha walked to the window, picking up the card, began to read. Congratulations to my baby brother. I'm so proud of you! First a degree on learning to read stories. Next a degree on how to change them. My brother, the law student! Love Stephen.

Trisha returned the card back on the windowsill, returned to her son's bed to lie down. She watched him sleep then joined him. Waking up two hours later, Trisha looked around the room. "Where's Jerry?"

The voices were too loud to keep Jerry asleep for long. In fact, the voices had been keeping him awake for days now. No sleep whatsoever. They would overlap, talking one on top of the other. Their words were confusing, offering no clear sense of direction. Jerry awoke with a clearer sense of what needed to be done now. Finally, the voices were making sense. Perhaps the medicine his mother had given him earlier was working after all. Round medicine works. Jerry quietly left his room not wanting to disturb his mother. He made his way down stairs to find his father asleep in the living room. The local news had just started on the television. Jerry left through the back door of the kitchen.

Jerry had only known H. G. Wells, Shakespeare, and Tennyson through their words, the stories and poems he had read. Now he could hear them. He could actually hear them, and they were all speaking to him more clearly than they ever had before. Jerry had been commissioned, an officer of the highest rank, of the Light Brigade. He had been given his orders. The battle was soon to be afoot. Jerry was off to Balaclava.

His comrades had been captured, taken as prisoners of war. Under military orders, Jerry was charged with freeing them. He knew the layout of the prison camp better than anyone else. This, no doubt, was the reason he was chosen to lead the mission. He would breach the enemy's camp, proceed immediately to their cell, extract, make way back to central command, and fortify. No doubt the enemy will launch a counter attack in retaliation. Jerry needed to make himself ready.

He soon arrived on the outskirts of Balaclava. The camp was in clear view. The gates had been left without any sentry. It was now or never. Jerry launched his offensive, running with cat-like agility at full speed through the gates, directly to the prison cell. Jerry quickly scanned the collection of inmates trying to locate his comrades amongst the herd. "Found you!" Jerry shouted. "And, you!" With Tennyson, Wells, and Shakespeare in hand, once again on the run, Jerry made his retreat. A sentry had now been dispatched at the gate. He gave a push before the enemy had time to ready her sword. Down she went hitting the ground hard.

Jerry never stopped running. Within a minute, he could hear the enemy's sirens. They were about to launch their counter offensive. He had to retreat back to the fort as soon as possible in order to stand a fighting chance. Winded and physically spent, Jerry slowly approached the fort, their central command. He looked closely; it had been abandoned. Everyone's gone. Had there been an attack? Why the retreat? Still under orders, Jerry had to find his own way into the locked fortress. He had his comrades wait while he found a rock of suitable size. The glass window crumbled and Jerry, along with this comrades, were soon safely inside their fortress.

The rooms of the fortress were dark. Jerry turned on the lights. Make no mistake about it; he was ready for the enemy. He was ready for war. When they arrived to the fort, which he knew would be at any moment, he wanted them to know just where to find him. Within ten minutes, three enemy vehicles were stopped. He could spot soldiers on the move. He could hear them running down the hallway. How did they breach the fortress so quickly? Just who is this enemy? They were in the room swarming.

"Put your hands up! Don't move!"

"Run Wells! Get out of here Tennyson!"

Jerry felt the enemy take hold of his body first at the back of the neck, then his right arm. Forced to the floor, his arms were restrained with shackles.

"I'm not going back to Balaclava!" Jerry screamed.

Mike and Trisha searched the house only to find the back door ajar.

“He’s gone!”

“Where would he go?”

“Maybe the library?”

As they turned the corner, merging into the entry lane to the library, they saw flashing lights. Two police cars and an ambulance. Neither spoke a word worried doing so would push the other over the brink into a nightmare. Until they were told otherwise, their son was safe and unharmed. Neither wanted to ruin that hope for the other.

“What happened?” Mike asked the first police officer he saw, who was just a boy no older than Jerry.

Jerry was in a room all to himself, a hospital room. At first he thought it was a dungeon, a makeshift military prison, believing this because his mind told him this was so. Now his mind was telling him he was in a hospital. His thoughts and perceptions were changing.

For weeks his thoughts were disturbing him. He might be reading and all a sudden the book was saying something back. The author telling him something special, unknown to anyone else who had ever read their stories. He felt like a young teenager being tempted, coerced by would-be buddies to participate in mischief, reluctant, still knowing right from wrong, but desperately wanting to fit in, to be part of the in-crowd. Jerry decided to give into his mind’s temptation, a form of neuro peer pressure, and ignore all the other voices, like his parents, professors, and his few friends left back at college. Jerry simply became a ghost, surrendering his will to the cognitive machine within.

Giving into his mind’s suggestion felt comfortable, welcoming as an old friend. Until that moment, it was as if he had been swimming against the current of a fast moving river. Now he was simply letting his mind go limp, the current taking over. Unlike before, it all made sense. There was purpose, clarity, and direction as the current picked up speed, churning white water.

It was only an hour ago, the prison guard from the enemy force, injected him with poison, probably a truth serum in order to make him divulge military secretes. He tried to resist, but his arms were shackled. Jerry closed his eyes continuing to imagine he was being carried through the white waters of his mind. Within minutes, the rushing water began to subside; it was no longer so deep, quickly becoming shallow. He hit a rock underneath, followed by another one. Now there was a different force, a new force dragging him to shore, wringing out the pathologically saturated pores of his mind. Jerry’s psychosis was fading away; a state of sobriety once again restored.

As the medication achieved a state of sanity, clarity, Jerry was reminded of his actions throughout the day: The scene in the library that morning, his father taking him to the hospital, the pyramid of books, pushing the librarian, Ms. Rose, to the ground, and the final incident occurring at the high school were it all came to an end and the police took him into custody and had him involuntarily hospitalized.

Ms. Rose was always so kind. She encouraged Jerry to pursue a major in literature. He'd known her since he was a child. She read Sendack's *Where the Wild Things Are* to him on Saturday mornings. His memory was unleashing images of him pushing her to the ground. She wasn't an enemy combatant; she was his friend. Did his actions result in any injury to her? He truly hoped not. Jerry felt a wave of shame crashing over him. He wanted to hide, disappear, and fade away into nothing. At that moment, Jerry wished he could jump back into the white foamy waters of his psychosis. Life would truly be easier to face if psychotic. The antipsychotic drug had vivisected his psyche, opening the inner workings of his cognitive machine for self-examination. The horror of his psychosis was trusted upon him as he lay restrained in his hospital bed.