

Some Thoughts on the Lyric Essay

If you bother to read this at all it is a clear indication your life is intolerable and you seek a distraction by engaging in the activity you are presently pretending to engage in. I say *pretending* because you would never have reached the conclusion your life is intolerable had you not also reached the conclusion it is unreal. But long before one of the living comes to such a conclusion — that life is unreal — he first passes through the conclusion that reading is unreal, unreal because it is literally an imaginative act, so much so that no one *actually* reads, and has not actually read since he first learned how, compounded, of course, by the present-day fact that no one “actually” reads anymore anyway. But little do any of your problems bother me on such a fine day, a fine day in plain view to anyone who happens to look up from their reading. All day I look at the grass. A woman in a big hat walks by. The wind! I don’t want the wind to take the hat, so I take the wind. I sneeze. Occasionally I feel I am being born. At such moments of birth, I am seized by a feeling of frightening abundance. There are too many trees in the world. There are too many trees and too many people, far too many people; there is too much shampoo and too much toothpaste, too much pollution, dirt, rocks, and grass — far too much grass. The birds — too many of them fly. Don’t bother counting, you’ll never come to an end. Ditto pencils and pens. Don’t mention books! Have you come to the part where I am only pretending to write? Surely you can tell I am only pretending to write. This is what pretending to write looks like: it looks like this. Not a landscape and yet passing before your eyes, unrolling as featureless as a plain and often you are the antelope, scared to have been born under such dismal skies. And you, aren’t you only pretending to read? Yes, I can feel it, I can feel your eyes on my back, and I grant you, antelope, I am afraid, and the only way I can control my fear — of you pretending to read — is to go on pretending to write, and so long as I go on, you too shall go on. Isn’t existence grand, the grandest bond between two you can imagine? Doesn’t it outstrip your finest memory? Memories are worthless, have you

ever stopped to consider that? Do you remember being by the seashore and watching the great broom of the sea come swooping down on the shore, pushing all the glinty particles of sand out of its way? The sound of the sea's broom was so tremendous, it sloshed the fluid in your ears. What did you come to the beach for anyway? Summer reading? What a pretense! Reading can't slosh the fluid in your ears the way a wave can. And the equatorial grass of the dunes looks and grows as a woman's hair when it is long and dry and white as parsnips. Parsnips, cut into disks and sautéed with an onion and a little garlic in a pool of green olive oil, could fool anyone into thinking they were something finer, nobler, more expensive and rare, not unlike the experience of dining on a well-prepared rabbit. The rabbit, another exquisite subject one could write a book about! One wonders, for example, whether there are more rabbits in the world than books, or more books than rabbits. Either way, what has happened to the world since its inception is condensed in the specimen of a single hare. It is real and it has reproduced itself, eaten parsnips and grasses, and been condemned to die at a railroad crossing. Soon the trains, too, shall pass out of all being, while books, I'm afraid, will go on pretending they are still among us. My friend — for nothing hinders me from calling you my friend, especially the fact that we have never met and are only now pretending to — if all the world were made of paper, and perhaps it is, it could one day conceivably burn for years, like the rain forests of Brazil were once so fond of doing, and eventually we'd be reduced to a few square heaps of ash, as if the sun had strayed too close, or one among us drifted too far, the sensitivity of his organs of perception so extreme he regarded all of civilization, and most of literature, as an illusion.