"That we Find and Follow..."

ALSO BY JAMES HOLLIS, PH.D.

Finding Meaning in the Second Half of Life
Why Good People Do Bad Things

WHAT MATTERS MOST

Living a More Considered Life

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GOTHAM BOOKS

Chapter Eight

That We Find and Follow the Path of Creativity and Delight in Foolish Passions

"What if you slept, and what if in your sleep you dreamed, and what if in your dream you went to heaven and there plucked a strange and beautiful flower, and what if when you awoke you had the flower in your hand? Ah, what then?"

Samuel Taylor Coleridge

"Man cannot tarry long in a state of consciousness; he must retire again into the unconscious, for that is where his roots are."

Paul Klee, *Farbenlehre*

Just this morning I was with a man who practices a very serious profession in a very serious way with a lifelong commitment to justice, social equity, and to making his community a better place to live. In the midst of our session he made a very serious confession, an admission of sorts, and waited for a reaction. He confessed . . . are you ready for this? He confessed that in the last eighteen months he had become an *oenophile*! Yes, it was a humbling confession that he had come to love, be fascinated by, the cultivation of

grapes, the process through which they are nurtured, harvested, treated, and the mysterious elixir that may or may not result from this alchemical process. In short, gasp . . . he had become a lover of the cultivation and delectation of wines!

So what is the problem here?

In his value system, with all its emphasis on right values, right work, right vocation, being an oenophile felt like an indulgence, an affectation. He associated oenophilia with snobbery, with excess money, and with idleness. Perhaps this vinous enthusiasm is embodied by some who fit this description, but not this man. What he is suffering at the moment is the gulf between what Freud called the "Over-I" (*Über-Ich*/Super-Ego) and the "It-ness of his nature" (*Das Es*, the Id, the It). But it seems that something of his nature insisted, and forced a natural enthusiasm to the surface, despite his considered, and considerably refined, moral reservations.

Perhaps with equal perversity,* pandas animate the "foolish passion" of a close friend. She literally travels the world to visit them, daily feasts on live Internet feeds from various zoos, and has formed many distant friendships through this common passion. Pandas speak to something deep within her, and such moments are to be honored. Something within each of us is stirred by forms, images, values, to which others may prove indifferent or incredulous. If such images and forms speak to us, occasion *resonance*, then they express in outer form some analogue to what lies within. To those things that do not resonate within

* *Perversity* means to turn away from the norm, to be original, to experiment, not to be confused with *perversion*.

us, we are indifferent, no matter what the endorsement by fashion, popular taste, or vested authority. Such stirring within must be respected, for it is a movement of soul whose vagaries can never nor should be subsumed by mere practicality.

One of the most risible book titles I ever encountered was, as best I distantly, inaccurately remembered from the graduate school shelves, *On the Outbreak of Enthusiasm in London in the Year 1702*, written by a most worthy Bishop of London, Edmund Gibson, who was inveighing against the rise of dissenters from the Anglican church. He was, of course, using the word *enthusiasm* (*en-theos*) in its original sense, namely, "to be possessed by a god." The word then was roughly equated with "intoxication" or "possession" by dissident ideas. Truly, to be possessed by a god is a matter of great moment. But the good Bishop was probably inveighing against such subversive elements as Methodists or Quakers, who found their "enthusiasms," or personal revelations, as a confirmation of something real within them. But apparently someone else's "enthusiasm" may prove a threat to the rest of us.*

It is of profound importance, of course, to know the difference between being possessed by a "god" and possessed by a "complex." Many who have fallen in love, or acted violently, learned too late to consider the difference. To be

* With the help of a Drew University librarian, we found that the actual, much more mellifluous title was *The Bishop of London's Pastoral Letter to the People of his Diocese; especially those of the two great cities of London and Westminster: by way of Caution against Lukewarmness on one hand, and Enthusiasm on the other* (London, 1739). (This bestseller is, of course, not to be confused with that other perennial favorite, *The Enthusiasm of Methodists and Papists Considered*, by Bishop Lavington, 1820.)

possessed by a complex is to have our ego consciousness owned by a split-off aspect of ourselves. To be possessed by a god, so to speak, is to be summoned to an obedience to something higher. Even then, we have to ask, Which god? What choices? "What circumstances?" In a previous book* I wrote about a young man who felt possessed by Mars, the Latin god of rage, among other things. As metastatic cells raged within him, he raged as well at the prospect of early death. At least he was conscious of what possessed him in those dark hours.

Of any "possession" we have to ask, "What does it ask of me? and "What are the consequences of this imperative?" Just because it is a god who possesses us does not mean its outcome will be benign or salubrious. Do we not have to attend the distinction between what the gods ask of us and what our ethical responsibilities are? After all, great atrocities have been committed in the name of various gods, or maniacal "enthusiasms." Mob psychology is an enthusiasm. Ordinary people placed in extraordinary circumstances have murdered their fellow humans with considerable enthusiasm, whether their cause was religion, or the state, or some vile prejudice handed down by the generations. As Daniel Goldhagen's book *Hitler's Willing Executioners* illustrates, it is not so difficult to coopt willing psyches and mobilize them in service to murderous enthusiasms.

So much for cautionary considerations, but how, one asks, could a love of the art and science of wines be a "higher calling"? How can any "enthusiasm"? Well, for one, we do not

* The discussion of Fritz Zorn's searing memoir, *Mars*, appears in *Why Good People Do Bad Things: Understanding Our Darker Selves*, p. 53.

choose our enthusiasms; they choose us. The difference is huge. We can acquire an enthusiasm, learn it from someone else, of course, be influenced by those around us, but if it does not occasion *resonance* within us, it will be a passing fancy. *Re-sonance* means to "re-sound," to set off echoes within us, to perseverate within, as a tuning fork hums long after it is struck. Whenever we experience resonance, something continues to hum for us. I recall the great sculptor Henry Moore being asked how he was able to sustain his creativity for so many decades and he replied that his passion was so great that he could not chip it all away. And Yeats, to cite another person who remained a creative soul for many decades, a passionate pursuer of his enthusiasms—whether they were political independence for Ireland, art, occult avenues to mystery, or a woman named Maud—wrote in response to a critique of his continuous growth and change:

> My friends who have it I do wrong
> Whenever I remake my song,
> Should know what issue is at stake:
> It is myself that I remake.

His enthusiasms kept him alive and creative up to his deathbed, where he still described himself as "a wild, wicked old man" who prayed, "Grant me an old man's frenzy, / Myself must I remake."

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Let us also witness the creative process within each of us through the dream that Cynthia, an investment banker,

presented very recently, a dream that brings her into the presence of an old friend, Charles, from Cincinnati. Charles appears, dapper, energetic. Cynthia's mother walks on stage; Charles changes to staid clothing, fitting an investment banker's persona. Moreover, the setting appears to be some sort of funeral home. Charles has his new wife present, and Cynthia's mother presents the new wife with a dress, a dress apparently belonging to the decedent. There the dream ends. Who would make this stuff up? Yet there it is: Cynthia's dream, with Cynthia's friend from high school and, sure enough, Cynthia's mother.

Cynthia received this nocturnal visitation as we all do, with confusion, bemusement, wonder, and mild apprehension. Her associations are critical to why her unconscious drew upon these figures to represent some deeper drama underfoot in her contemporary life. Charles, whom she has not seen for many moons, was adventuresome, willing to change careers, explore, take risks. Her mother was highly risk averse. Charles's new wife would seem to be some new relationship to "the feminine," attached to a more vigorous animus, but her mother still stifles this new possibility with the attire of the old and dead.

When we understand that Cynthia is at a critical juncture in her career, in her life, we see how the unconscious seems to be responding. Cynthia wants to make a change, she wants the freedom to re-create herself, as Charles has modeled for her, but when her "mother complex" shows up it seems to shift "Charles" back into a conventional mode, and cloak him with the dress of the dead. Cynthia's mother is in fact long deceased, but the internalization of her values is far from dead. (Death, like divorce, does not end relationships, as many have learned.) The generic form of the "mother complex," as such having little to do with her actual mother, shows up in her need for security, for choosing the safe and conventional, and for sticking with her investment banking career, which she emotionally outgrew long ago. Her mother's lack of sufficient "enthusiasm" reinforced this timorous attitude, but Cynthia is the author of her own biography these days. Every one of us at some level knows what we want to do, need to do, have to do to live our lives.

The dream has pretty well laid out Cynthia's contemporary dilemma before her consciousness. She has already achieved what she, and her mother, wanted for her, but what did her soul* want? It wants what Cynthia admits to herself she wants, a new life, new ventures, the reclamation of pieces of herself left behind. But the "mother complex" stands in the way. Notice the dream is without solution, for the situation is ongoing. Cynthia is now clearer that what stands in her way is not an outer obstacle, but an inner impediment, namely, an archaic message to please her parent, and to avoid risk. Perhaps there were good reasons in the life of her parent to identify with and reiterate those values, but for Cynthia her developmental dilemma is whether she will surrender to the creative desire of her own psyche to end one form of her journey and begin another, or succumb to the admonitions of the past. Tapping into her emergent enthusiasm will reenergize her and confuse all her financial colleagues, who will be puzzled why someone would slay the cash cow she currently milks. But for many, deep inside, they will also envy her for what she has discovered.

* Recall that the literal translation of *psyche* from the Greek means "soul."

As we know, life is a series of passages. In every passage there is a death of some sort, the death of naïveté, the death of a dependency, the death of an understanding of self and world. And, after that death, there is often a terrible "in-between," sometimes lasting years. Our ego understandably does not cotton to the idea of anything dying; vested as it is in its own security and maintenance, it will prolong, resist, deny, as long as it can, the dismantling of the old.* The terrible "in-between" is what often brings people into therapy, for they feel very much alone and ineffective in restoring the former sovereignty of the ego.** I have not only gone through this process often myself, but have attended it with analysands hundreds of times. The good news and bad news are both the same: we are asked to *die*. Only through this death can our natural creativity enact its developmental plan. Sounds easy in theory, but not so cheery to go through. Nonetheless, if one can step back and see that this is the nature of nature, that our own psyche is directing these deaths in order to bring us to the next stage, we might, from time to time, facilitate rather than resist the creative process.

Here is another example of the creative process at work. Although there are many other venues for insight, I choose a dream because dreams are so clearly outside the control of our ego. (If you think you are in charge, order up a certain kind of dream tonight, and see if your psyche pays any attention to you whatsoever.) Moreover, do not dismiss the radical summons a dream makes upon us simply because it might employ images from the late-night news or what you read in the paper. How easy it is to evade the summons to this radical creative process within us by seeking to explain it away. The psyche is a scavenger and will borrow or steal from your history, or from recent events, and then bring in some impossible, ahistorical situation, mix them all together and say: "So, how do you like them apples?"

* As Woody Allen once said, he didn't want to become immortal by someone naming a street after him; he wanted to become immortal by not dying.

** This process of death and rebirth are discussed in much greater detail in my *The Middle Passage: From Misery to Meaning at Mid-Life* and *Creating a Life: Finding Your Individual Path.*

Certainly, most modern psychologies shun dream work by labeling such spectral visitants unimportant firings of neurons, or the dumping of day residue. These dismissive attitudes arise from unspoken, unaddressed fears of those who are yet to stand naked in front of the awesome power of their own unconscious. Were they to track those dreams with fidelity over time, they would have to change their lives, and who wants to do that? Even psychologists do not want to change. But, apparently, our psyche does.

Thomas has led a distinguished public life, a life that achieved much service to his community. In the context of analysis Thomas came to realize that he, like Cynthia above, had lived most of his life choices in unconscious servitude to his mother's wishes. I have described his process in my last two books, and our work continues. In the first book, Thomas is back in university sitting for an exam. He recognizes that a stern examiner, with the voice and tone of his mother, is conducting the exam, but he also suddenly realizes that he does not have to take the exam, or meet her expectations, and he gets up and walks out of the classroom. In the second book I described how his psychologically absent father began to make cameo appearances in his dreams, stirring Thomas's deep hunger for the respect, advice, and model

of a father. Also in that book I recounted his dream of a man in scuba gear who comes up out of the water and wishes to engage him in animated conversation, dialogue that the dreamer understands will be directive and empowering. Here is a recent installment of the roughly 180 dreams that Thomas has presented over the last three and a half years:

> I sat on a crowded pew in a worship service of some kind. The minister called a young man near the front and asked him to speak to the congregation. The young man acted strange, looking about as though he didn't know where he was. He stood up, stumbled, and then sat down again. The minister persisted, insisting that he say something. The more confused the young man appeared, the more aggressive the clergyman was in his urging. It was apparent the young man was inebriated or ill.
>
> My father looked at me and said quietly, "Help him."
>
> I got up and took the youth by the arm and outside to my car. I drove him out of the city into the countryside. Soon we came to a cabin in the woods, where we waited for my father.
>
> I went to the bathroom. When I returned the young man seemed fine. He was at the stove frying bacon. The aroma filled the cabin and smelled delicious.

Again, who among us thinks such stuff up? Thomas immediately identified with the young man who was confused and disabled. His recollection of the religious practices of his youth were that they were coercive and synonymous with his mother's values and intentions for him, which he, like most children, internalized and lived out as best he could.

By now in the analytic process, however, we see that his father is much more present, providing the sort of advice and energy that so counterbalances the childhood domination of his mother. He takes the young man, his inner life left behind, from the ego structures of the church and city to the restorative unconscious where that undernourished part of himself revives. Thomas recalls the delight he took from his favorite food, bacon, as a youth, and he is heartened here by the clear feeling that father energy is finally on its way to further the healing of this young man. So our growth and healing never ends, nor does the summons to be more attentive to such an agenda.

Another, even more recent, dream adds to this unfolding, healing story. Thomas dreams:

> I am walking in a large yard. My dad comes out dressed in a beautiful new suit and topcoat—gray with herringbone pattern. I notice he was wearing new shoes, tie, and white shirt.
>
> He was preparing to leave for Great Britain. I touched him on the shoulder and told him how good I thought he looked. He was touched by my compliment. We walked a short distance together and I noticed he was several inches taller than me.

We see how these images, which arise from the telluric depths of the psyche, demonstrate that the healing process continues. His once-missing father now turns up, looking rather spiffy, as the carrier of a more generative energy. The dreamer's association with Great Britain was with the exciting idea of travel, foreign adventure, and something "great."

At dream's end, the two, father and son, are clearly in a more harmonious relationship, suggesting how the "missing father" complex, and the compensatory empowerment it embodies, has evolved, bringing Thomas greater access to the captaincy of his own journey.

And now, months later, just before I sent this manuscript off to the publisher, Thomas brought me still one more dream, the short version of which is that he is emerging from a dark, decrepit structure. Across the street is a blazing, luminous pharmacy labeled THE SOJOURNER TRUTH PHARMACY! From this place his father steps forth, again nattily dressed. Thomas is proud to be his son, and they walk off down the street arm in arm. Once again, that emerging father energy, so missing in his childhood, steps forth in a healing, empowering way, and the solitary traveler that Thomas feels he has often been is now on the Dharma Road, the sacred sojourn, the path of Truth, after all.

What these dreams have brought Thomas is a linkage to his early enthusiasm for life, a powerful life force that was mostly quashed and channeled by someone else's agenda. His enthusiasm for his unfolding journey has in turn led to the recovery of interests, talents, and investigations that fired the imagination of his youth. When we are doing what is right for us, the psyche provides enthusiasm—that is, the energy to support our investment in life.

If we should ever doubt that our essential nature is creative, we need only turn to our dreams as one illustration. As a folk proverb has it, we should take our dreams seriously because we are not intelligent enough to create them. Yet they are *our* dreams, phenomena rising from the self-regulatory psyche. Just how is it that such a synthetic, synoptic intelligence abides within all of us? Those "scientists" who debunk dreams have not really spent any effort over time to track their motifs, correctives, insights, and intimations. So you, the reader, will dream tonight, and just what is your third-grade teacher doing in your place of current business? Could it be that what is most troubling you today is an issue that has its genesis way back then, and is personified in her guest appearance on your inner stage? Could it be that this spontaneously generative set of images can open you further to the essential mystery that courses through all of us?

This creative process is found in all of us, and also asks much of us. It comes to us as symptoms that embody hidden correctives, compensatory dreams, depressions that tell us that psyche will no longer cooperate with our faulty choices, and so on. This creative process always asks a death of some old attitude, which is why we resist our own growth and development so often that something else has to take over, or our children have to carry out the unfinished projects for us. What we may also not have considered along the way is that every time we have shunned our summons to creativity, left undeveloped a talent or capacity, we have thereby removed that gift from the world. Our gift to the world is honored by bringing our best self to it; paradoxically, we do that by sacrificing ego comforts to our creative process, which, killing off the old, drives the project that we are forward.

FOOLISH PASSIONS

As for those "foolish" passions, let us remember two things. They may only be foolish to the world, but they are not foolish to our souls, or they would not have the power to attract

libido, mobilize and guide its vectors. There is a big difference between wasting time—our popular culture offers a vast arena of possibilities for doing so—and having a passion. Jung noted that without some quickening of the spirit, we would all indulge our greatest occupation—idleness. But a quickened spirit summons us out of the sibilant susurrus of sleep into the world of passion. Remember that the word *passio* is the Latin word for "suffering." A passion is something we feel so deeply, so intensely that it hurts, yet much of worth comes from such a hurt. All of us have passions, but because they, too, ask much of us, we often dissemble, slip-slide away, and leave them along the road behind us.* Most of us have left passions behind, but if we are blessed by fate to live long enough, we have the opportunity to revive some of them, if not literally, then to at least symbolically value what aspect of our lives they represent.

Some years ago my wife and I visited the Museum of American Art, which is a part of the Smithsonian National Museum of American Art in Washington, DC. There we came across a large, bizarre, but compelling work of "folk art" with the unwieldy title: *The Throne of the Third Heaven of the Nations Millennium General Assembly.* It seems that this work was found in the garage of a District janitor, James Hampton (1909–64), who worked for the federal government's General Services Administration, and who had through his long years of laboring gathered discarded tinfoil,

* More than one person has said to me, "Writing must be easy for you." I do not know why they would say that. It is a personal suffering that demands that I work an hour here and there at the end of a long workday, sacrifice a normal life, and yet continue to show up in a disciplined way. But this passion rewards me with those occasional moments when the right word falls into place, from somewhere. These are just brief moments, always paid for, but worth it.

mostly from chewing gum, and many other "found objects." Over the years he labored by day through heat and cold and gloom of night to discharge his civic duty, but by night he indulged his passion. He brought those many pieces of foil home and assembled a large work, a visionary work of what Heaven might look like. His work is wondrously baroque, coming from a "simple" man, and is a profound gift to all of us. It consists of approximately 180 pieces that meld together old furniture, jelly jars, carpet cylinders, and much, much more with glue, tape, and pins. We cannot help but scratch our heads, and stand in wonder, at his foolish passion. This man may or may not have found Heaven after he died—which is when this work was finally discovered by others—but he certainly shares space with what Hart Crane called "the visionary company," namely, those who pierce the diaphanous membrane between this tangible, frangible world, and the other, perduring world that lies on the slope side of conventional reality. I was moved by his foolish passion, touched by his devotion, and reminded that each of us is obliged to construct our own myth, for—as that earlier visionary William Blake said—if we do not create our own myth, we will be enslaved to someone else's.

This evening, while out walking after supper, I came across a woman with a small white dog. We have walked together more than once and I always carry dog crunchies for such encounters. She said, in the midst of a conversation about her dog's health, "No one would understand why I care about her so much." I said that I could and did. In fact, my heart leaps up every time I see that small white dog because he reminds me of Shadrach, our Lhasa apso, who died in 2000. We still grieve him, speak of him as though he were

alive, and every day, en route to work, at a certain curve in the road where the skyline of downtown Houston hoves into view, I tell him how much we love him. In fact, I am half persuaded that one of these days a gaggle of saffron-robed monks from Tibet will show up to announce his reincarnation as the next Dalai Lama, or some such exalted office. Whatever high office he may then attain will pale before his privileged place in our hearts. So I think I do know something of what this lady feels for her foolish passion.

Those who know me know me as a worker, some would say a compulsive worker. One of my compensatory passions is reading; it is not an escape, for reading usually takes me deeper into something that then asks a response from me. Another is sports. As a child, I lived for reading and sports. The former has been a constant, the latter something I am now returning to as my timbers begin to creak and groan.

Let me give an example of how such foolish passion shows up in my current thinking by this memoir on, of all things, baseball. Let me take you, then, out to the old ball game. "Game" it is, but lest you think it is only a game, remember what surrealist Paul Eluard once said: "There *is* another world, and it is this one." So if the reader does not like sports, per se, read on, please, for this is really not about sports at all.

THE GREEN FIELDS OF MEMORY

"President Roosevelt died," my father said in April of 1945. I knew this was important because the radio played classical music for three days. I had never heard classical music before. Days later, my father said, "Hitler just died." "Does this

mean we can go home?" I asked. "Yes, soon." (Because of the war, we were in Racine, Wisconsin, rather than my hometown of Springfield, Illinois.) That was more than six decades ago, yet they are very clear memories. Three years after that, my father said, "Babe Ruth died today." "Who is that?" I asked. "The greatest baseball player who ever lived," he said. He had moisture in his eyes this time, so this ratiocinative eight-year-old surmised that Babe Ruth was apparently more important than Roosevelt and Hitler. Shortly after that I asked for and received my first baseball accoutrement. It was one of those flat leather gloves only a bit bigger than the size of one's hand, with a bit of leather strung between the thumb and first finger. From that moment, and for years to come, I lived to play baseball.

Everyone I knew in our neighborhood in Springfield rooted for the Cardinals, and if not them, the Cubbies. I never met a White Sox fan, though the distance from Springfield to Comiskey Park was no farther than that to Wrigley Field. Yet, perversely, I became, and am now embarrassed to admit, a Yankee fan, for in that era no one had heard of somebody named George Steinbrenner. But I loved their quaint NY logo, had seen Gary Cooper in *The Pride of the Yankees*, and together they were enough to make me a true believer in America, the unshakable probity of certain heroes, and the pinstripes of the Bronx Bombers. When Gehrig said that he was "the luckiest man on Earth," I believed him, or at least until later when I saw patients choking to death from amyotrophic lateral sclerosis. For years I won dimes betting my friend Kent, who perversely followed the Dodgers, perhaps because they had the great Jackie Robinson, while I celebrated how DiMaggio and Mantle carried on the Ruth

and Gehrig legacy. I never got to see a real Yankee game until many years later, but I was exhilarated when I was able to buy a ragged Yankee cap with the NY logo with my lawn-mowing money from another kid down on his luck. No purchase in my life has ever brought such satisfaction as that ragged cap. The Yankee logo was, literally, sacred to me, and the reticulated towers of Yankee Stadium radiated as the terminus of a grail quest that I knew I would have to undertake when I grew up.

Now, these six decades later, I take a special satisfaction when "The Boss," and the best team money can buy, lose. What happened, why does it matter at all, and why does this silly game still have a hold on my soul? And why, like Hearst's "Rosebud" sled in *Citizen Kane*, does that cap, with its magical logo, still mean so much, when its facsimile is so easily available today in any store or via the Internet? Yet, even more, why I would not dream of wearing one today?

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Garry Wills once pointed out that the etymology of *paradise* suggested an enclosed green space. No matter how many games we may attend, who can deny that rush, that archetypal intimation of coming home, perhaps stealing home to the Edenic place, when one walks up through the concrete corridors and that lush green field first comes into view? (As a therapist, I have learned not to blink or gasp when the most horrific events are related to me, but when that rich green field comes into view, I always remember Dylan Thomas's "Fern Hill." His memory of his aunt's paradisiacal apple farm in Wales abides with him through darker, more distant

days, contending with his adult awareness that "time allows / in all his tuneful turning so few and such morning songs / before the children green and golden / follow him out of grace.")

So how, and why, does baseball still have a hold on me, and why does this foolish passion persist? Baseball is one of the few *constants* in an evanescent world. If we could transport one of the nineteenth-century New York Knickerbockers onto the field today, he would have no doubt how to play the game. Hit the ball, run to first, slide into third ahead of the ball. This is as clear as the expectations of a mariner on the Aegean millennia ago: sail the boat, seize the prize, don't drown, bring the damn thing home.

Another appeal of baseball, this foolish passion, is its *clarity*. There are winners and losers, even though most of us know by now that in real life we are all losers, that you never get ahead of the game, that in the end the game gets you—whatever game you are playing, whatever game is playing you. Moreover, the statistics of baseball make it relatively possible to hold the contemporary up against the classic, even if we debate the differences between the dead ball and the juiced ball, between the beer once scarfed down in the seventh-inning stretch by Ruth and Cobb with today's juiced, jaded, and roided-up millionaires. What was Johnson's ERA, and how does that compare with Koufax? How would Campy do against Dickey and Bench and Berra? The stats are there, seducing us to forget Disraeli's observation that there are "three kinds of lies: lies, damned lies, and statistics."

In a world grown dirty gray, there is also something *clean* about baseball. The ball is hit, fair or foul, with longitudes and latitudes to tell us which. Not since the death of

Dante in 1321, when the Western world still had relative consensus on the longitudes and latitudes of the soul, can we know fair from foul with any certainty. After all, in our time, did not Yeats's "Crazy Jane" tell us "fair and foul are next of kin." After Samuel Beckett and *Godot*, no white stripes remain on the field to tell us right from wrong, or where we are really headed.

Baseball, thus, is much about *nostalgia*, a word whose Greek origins speak of our "painful longing for home." We are exiles in our time, *entre deux guerres*, as Eliot put it, lost generations, Stein added, including the Boomers who boom a lot to hide their systemic desuetude and drift toward irrelevance. Only baseball offers clarity, for the moment, when nothing else does. When I saw *The Pride of the Yankees*, I could still believe we faithfully observed the Constitution of the United States, could count on the probity of the president, and trust the purity of American intentions. Today, only baseball remains. Between the white lines only does a predictable, albeit provisional, clarity preside. The short hop, the cutoff man missed, the slider that hits the corner . . . minor irritations in a minutely calibrated universe.

When I began to teach my son to play baseball, I carefully explained to him where the bases were, and the sequence in which one made their acquaintance. He promptly ran from home to second. "No, you go to first, first," I said. "Dad," this ten-year-old said, "first base is only arbitrary. I can go to second first." He was metaphors ahead of me already. He was already—without having read Jacques Derrida—a post-modern deconstructionist, and I was merely modern. So much for clarity of field, fixity of construct, and post-modern transfers of signification.

Yet so much of even baseball has changed. The players change cities with each contract. No longer can one consider that Pepper Martin will be a Cardinal, Whitey Ford a Yankee, or Duke Snider a Dodger. It is much more an assemblage of mercenaries now. Of course it always was, but one gets the sense that in the old days, most of the mercenaries played because they really loved it and considered themselves privileged to get paid for doing what they loved to do anyway. Number 4, that Gehrig guy, was accosted on a road trip in the lobby of a hotel by a little old lady who asked him what he and the big guys around him did for a living. "We play baseball, ma'am," he said. "Why don't you get a job?" she said. They were boys in men's bodies, doing what we all want to do, continue the games that boys play. The *puer aeternus* today is a pathogenic complex describing a boy who never grows up, who may float from woman to woman, and who never works anything through—a playboy; but that youthful sense of play persists in healthy form; the summons of the game for the sake of the game is still a value timeless in our souls, floating as we do on the green fields of memory and aspiration. It was no good for the "Iron Horse," who played 2,130 consecutive games, to explain to the lady that it was a job also,* that they used equine liniment to nurse those aching bodies back onto the field, for she was really onto them—they *were* boys then, not mercenaries with negotiators and agents in their posse. When one loses the boy, something dies forever.

* While huge sacrifices were the norm throughout all strata of society during World War II, President Roosevelt insisted that professional baseball continue, knowing that it was something more than a diversion, that it sustained a community connection whose balm was good for the soul.

Finally, I got to see the Cards play the Giants at Sportsman's Park in St. Loo. Stan the Man was there with his corkscrew stance, freckled Red Schoendienst, Enos "Country" Slaughter, and Harry Caray's voice on the PA—what wonders they were! But the man I wanted to see was number 24, the "Say Hey Kid." Paul Geil was pitching. Willie swung mightily at a high heater, whirled around in centrifugal fury, and fell to earth with the force of his spent swing. He got up laughing and dusted himself off . . . laughing. Everyone laughed with him, everyone, especially the Cardinal fans. We all knew Willie Mays was a kid, like us, doing the thing he loved. Who could not love him for his joy?

Still another deep level in which baseball functions for us all, and still does today, is that it provides a way *for men to talk to each other.* We are pathologically isolated from women, even more from each other, and even more still from ourselves. So, we need a bridge to help us over the abyss. Politics and religion used to work, but in red and blue states today they only divide. But "What do you think the Mets are going to do this year?" and "Did you see Rivera shut down the Sox the other night?" still works. Moreover, it is still a way in which dads have something to transmit to their sons, quite apart from relaying the dreary prospect of being an economic beast of burden. Never mind that there is no tribal lore to transmit, never mind that we have so little else in common; this foolish passion baseball provides a meeting ground, a momentary bridge.

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I usually played second or shortstop. One night our third baseman was sick and I was shifted there. On an obvious

bunt situation, already pulled in tight, I rushed home. The batter squared around and smacked the ball, which caromed off my cheek toward the opponent's bench. I was knocked a bit loopy, for as I went after the ball, I was convinced that I was underwater and was trying to swim between the reedy legs of their third base coach to get to the ball. As reported to me, some yahoo in the crowed yelled, with guffaw and crowd approval, "Hey, kid, you catch the ball with your glove, not your face." He was sitting next to my father, who, a gentle, peaceful man, had some words with him. I learned all this later, and was proud of my father for standing up for me. I wish I had sometimes stood up as well for him as he did for me that night.

Through the power of this foolish passion to form common ground momentarily between men, we can use shorthand like, "Texas leaguer," "can of corn," "suicide squeeze," "split-finger fastball," and other forms of mythopoeic arcana that serve to link those otherwise separated from each other and themselves. The celebration of rituals so common to the game, the lingua franca of the trade, the deontological clarity of fair and foul, the affective surge that accompanies the bottom of the ninth, provide religious dimensions to our fragmented experience. This is why such foolish passions endure. It is a silly waste of energy to the uninitiated, only one grade above smacking a white ball around a green sward, but to those who have tasted the dust, smelled the oil rubbed into a new glove, or felt the thwack of the bat ripple through their entire body, it is a religion of sorts, a religion that links one to the tribal fathers, to the timeless, to a presumptive fixity of fair and foul, and therefore not to be casually discounted in this time or the next.

With this foolish passion, there is something tangible to learn, and it is learnable. Most of our pursuits, especially in the "virtual realities" we inhabit, are exhaustingly elusive. As a therapist, I know that I am always dealing with the invisible world, though it is a world at least as real as the world we see. (Indeed, it creates the world we see.) But baseball offers a world we can see, and asks for skills that most of us were willing to learn, a discipline to which most of us were willing to submit: how to judge while the ball is still in transit from the rubber to home, and the batter beginning the first phase of the swing, where the ball, if hit, is likely to land; how to slide while wearing spikes for the first time without breaking an ankle, as the Giants' Monte Irvin did; or how to slide away from the throw to provide as little target for the tag as possible; or how to lead off just enough to rattle the pitcher in his stretch, without suffering the humiliation of getting picked off, or falling for the oldest of dumbbell plays, the hidden-ball trick. These things clamored for learning, and we learned them, and felt that we had, in this narrow frame at least, learned something, and even occasionally mastered something. Something learned, really learned. After Husserl and phenomenology, after Heidegger and *Daseinanalysis*, after Wittgenstein and "language games," something learned, finally. So: "Find the relay man; hold your position but lean toward the gap, shorten your grip on the bat so slightly that they don't know you intend to bunt." Something learned—never again so much learned, so clearly. Never again, ever. How grateful one remains for that. Never discount that grateful feeling.

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Like many boys, I wanted to wear those Gotham pinstripes. Ruth (#3) and Gehrig (#4) were gone, as was DiMaggio (#5), their heir, but by the time I was an adolescent, it was a kid from Spavinaw, Oklahoma (#7). If someone from Spavinaw could make the bigs, then surely I could. Later I would learn that this is the fallacy of false analogy. It seems that the gods gave the almost perfect body to Mickey Mantle, not *moi*.

For a few, brief, adolescent moments, when I learned I did not have the talent, that I had to quit baseball forever and go to work at age sixteen to help the family, I felt that I had invented tragedy.* Decades later—though he once owned a Holiday Inn of his own in Joplin, Missouri, where he briefly played on the way up to Yankee Stadium; though he batted .353, hit 52 dingers, and had 130 ribbies in 1965 (those stats are burned in my mind); though he could fly to haul down line-drive gappers; though he got a liver transplant in Dallas—I came to learn that real tragedy was not my shortfall from the baseball gods, but really being Mickey Mantle.

Though I had a bone disease of my own, Mickey's osteomyelitis was positively heroic. The photo of him bandaged, leaking blood at Yankee Stadium, was more heroic than *Sands of Iwo Jima*. I was not then informed about the booze, the women, his devouring anxiety about playing in the bigs. I presumed that not being Mickey Mantle was sad; later I learned that being Mickey Mantle was sad, sometimes really sad.

* I was not the only person invested in this fantasy. A grade-school friend of mine recently reminisced that he fully believed that I would in fact become a Major League player. He did not add that he was disappointed in me too.

Tragedy is such a devalued concept in our time. Actually, it is a heroic sensibility, a summons to consciousness, an admonition to greater reverence for the gods. We are raised up, serve as playthings to the gods, fall, and then the responsibility for such a tumble is ours, we are told. Wait a moment—how is that *our* fault, we who so casually confuse "fate" with "destiny"? Fate is what is given to us; destiny is what we are summoned to become. In the interplay of the two, human character plays a role. *Hubris*, or the fantasy that we know enough to know enough, seduces us toward choices that lead to unintended consequences. *Hamartia*, the failure to see clearly enough, to see humbly enough, is a lens through which we imperfectly envision the world, unavoidably distorting and reductive, but convincing at the moment nonetheless.

So Mickey was born with a genetic heritage, a disorder that took his ancestors early, and yet he wore a beautiful, godlike body—an Adonis who could run from a dead start to first in 3.1 seconds. His genetically doomed father, perhaps compensating for his own unlived life (Jung said that "the greatest burden the child must bear is the unlived life of the parent"), taught Mickey to bat both ways. Such an unnatural act reduces the advantage that right- or left-handed pitchers can achieve, and ought to be worth ten points in the batting average—that absolute, eschatological moral index—by the end of the year. And so it was with blinding speed, great hand-eye coordination, and the pinstripes, those glorious pinstripes, that he stepped into the circle of divinity.

On another occasion my parents took me to Sportsman's Park to see the sad-sack Brownies against the Yanks. It was a

sacred pilgrimage to me. Mickey went hitless that day, but during batting practice he lifted one up and out of the field into the third tier. That swing confirmed that he was for real—a god, indeed.

But Mickey lived beyond those years of walking among the gods. (Where have you gone, Joe DiMaggio, and Marilyn, and Elvis?) He lived hard, and he lived rough. He said it was because he did not realistically expect, given his genetic heritage, to live very long. Like the jazz man Hubie Blake, who, at age ninety-nine, said, "I would have treated myself better if I had known I would live this long," Mickey pushed and abused his body.

Perhaps he had to do so in order to fulfill the tragic cycle: a man raised to greatness, cursed/blessed by the gods, brought to acts of high moment, and then hurtled to humbling defeat. However, in the tragic vision, the whole point is to bring one back into right relationship with the gods. Lear, not a bad man, but a foolish man, does not understand what love is, until the gods stipple knowledge on his aging brow. He learns what love is, what abides, and is the better for it. Did Mickey complete the tragic cycle? I do not know. I do know that he repented some of his decisions, and their impact on his family.

Aristotle said that the citizens of Athens who watched the tragic trilogies experienced the catharsis of two profound emotions: pity and fear. Pity: "I experience, and grieve, the suffering of another."

Fear: "I fear that I, too, will fall into some similar pit that perhaps lies beneath my nervous tread." The philosopher believed that these affectively evocative enactments on stage actually served a therapeutic, healing function for the

public. They could look on in horror at what happens when we meet the gods, be chastened to greater mindfulness around their own precarious steps, and experience the release of emotions that, unexpressed, might prove toxic. I still revere the Mick—the subway series with the Bums, the fleet antelope running down a fly to right center, the Ballantine Blasts—but I would not want to be Mickey. The gods sent him, and *moi*, to our separate tragic engagements. But I only got a clue as to how tough it must have been to be Mickey after I got a clue as to how tough it was proving to be myself. Unlike Mickey, I am still here for now, kicking it around, still working on figuring it out.

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Goethe's personal motto was *Dauer im Wechseln*—"what abides amid change." So, what provides continuity amid our sundry discontinuities? Certainly the Self abides our constant deaths. Our cells divide, die, generate at a slowing pace, and we are not the same bodies now as the moment before. Memory helps, but we cannot even answer the simple question "Of what are we unconscious?" Yet there are, from time to time, points of reference, benchmarks, lines drawn from which we get a provisional baseline, a fleeting summons to the next goal, a moment's thought that this absurd, arbitrary game we call our lives might actually mean something. Sometimes a foolish passion opens a slit into the mystery. And, as Louis Armstrong said of jazz, those who have to have it explained to them will never know.

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Things fall apart . . . the center cannot hold, as Yeats proclaimed in 1917. And since that slippage began, most things we cherish have gone still farther south, fast. Yet certain moments abide, certain foolish passions continue to nourish and animate. Perhaps, even at this moment, it still is the bottom of the ninth, runners on second and third, 2 and 0 on the batter, and the pitch is loosed. . . . All is open, it seems, *still*; the game is on, *now*; the game is on, and *we are in it.*