

**Just waiting
(or, looking back on the lines of his face)¹**

TLÖNY Well, here we are. Now the question is, what, or who, are we waiting for? Or in the language of the inhabitants of one of the hemispheres of my marvelously pluralistic planet, I should say: Our woman-becoming and our man-becoming anticipating the coming of his/her becomingness, that will represent a process initiating the savoring, salvaging and general resuscitating and recouping, of our self-perpetuating entropying, our impending demising.

FUNY: Just spit it out, man. What there is, *is*, clearly and distinctly, without reference to past or future. Your present participles have no business in my hypernominalistic language, for I'm Humean through and through—that is the one and only true metaphysical posture, by the way. Give me the nouns and nothing but the nouns, and I can without a moment's hesitation name what there is, with neither remorse nor regrets (actually I once devised an alternative number system consisting of completely arbitrarily and unordered names instead of numbers: ingenious, if I might say so).

HLADDY: I agree with Funy. Tlöny, you really have no need of becoming, that is, of time. Forget about time. I once wrote an entire play in less than the blink of an eye—or in less than a rifle shot,

¹ Allusion in the parenthetical clause of the title is obviously to some of Jorge Luis Borges's final lines in *El hacedor* (*Dreamtigers*). What follows is a dialogue by fictional characters representing characters in Borges's fictions, all of which should be immediately recognizable. They solipsistically and felicitously talk past each other and in the process talk fictive metatheory in reference to us rather somnambulistic literary critics. Their pseudodialogical encounter is the result of my own very tenuous tongue-in-cheek effort to remind us of our fallibility and fallacies with the suggestion that perhaps we need not take ourselves so seriously. So, please enjoy.

if I may put it so cryptically. We have no need of time. In essence everything is always already here and now.

TLÖNY: There is essentially no essence, and matter is of no matter, for all there is is mind. And my mind is capable of bringing into existence his/her excellence for whom we lie in wait on the stage of our world at my pleasure. (Unfortunately I'll have to resort to your language; it seems that you have trouble coping with the subtle dialects of my planet, what with your need for the security of nouns and all.)

LÖNNY: My hyperlogical reasoning regarding the future tells me that, since our venerable restorer of all that is good remains eternally outside our venerated empirical positivist tradition, we stand nary a chance of computing the exact time and place of his/her appearance. You, Tlöny, are trapped in a labyrinth of your own making. Either that, or you're dreaming.

MAGGIE: Life is a dream. And a dream? Nothing but a dream. I must confess that I once thought I was different, but alas, those concentric tongues of fire that approached me while meditating on my circular ruins revealed that essence forever remains beyond me.

FUNY: What garble! Who let her in?

HLADDY: Dream? If you are dreaming you can't say either "I am dreaming" or "I am awake," for there is nothing outside the dream by which to gauge your dreaming or waking state. Actually, you can know neither whether you are dreaming or whether you are awake.

T'SUI: Time? Dream? Essence? Mind? It's all according to the mouth of the thinker. Time is infinitely repeatable, so it is eternal, so there is no time. And essence? Who is to say what is as it is and what is mere figment. In another parallel diverging or converging time, we might all be dreaming, some of us might be dreaming and others not, we might populate a world whose furniture is of solid matter, or it might be a subtle construct of our minds. Who are we to know who we are or when he/she for whom we garner tenuous anticipation will decide to make his/her grand appearance.

EMMY: I once faked a rape and shot my fictitious accoster and got off scot free. Now that's changing your own parallel line for another one. Dream, shmeam. What I do I do, and I make no bones about it.

FUNY: A woman after my own heart, that is, what was my heart a second ago, for it is now another heart, no, oh dear, I no longer know what it is – if it really is, that is.

LÖNNY: Ha! Spoken like a genuine Humean. Utter drivel. Combine Lönny with Tlöny and you have Tweedledum and Tweedledee. Tlöny's world is a Berkeleyan fantasy land and Lönny's is no more than bundles of percepts displacing each other with numbing frequency. Put them together, and if a repetition there can ever be, then that will be living proof that time is henceforth refuted.

MAGGIE: The pot calling the kettle black. You once waltzed to your death at the fourth comer of your woven labyrinth as if time did not exist, only to realize that your temporal repetitions were somewhat asymmetrical and hence temporalized, and you met with your death at the hands of he who was to have become your prisoner. I'm familiar with your pathetic game.

LÖNNY: Me? Dead? I'll have you know my reasoning powers are beyond the pale of life and death. I suggested to my would be assassin that we should simplify our labyrinth to a one-dimensional line, that line within which so many metaphysicians have lost their way. He agreed that it would be a more parsimonious labyrinth, and then proceeded to fire his pistol in my direction. But before the slug traveled the distance between his instrument of death and my heart, it had to travel half the distance, then half of that distance, *ad infinitum*, without ever piercing my chest in his or my lifetime. You see? I already had him caught in a one-dimensional labyrinth I subtly wove before him.

PIERRE: I too disagree with Lönny's hopeful refutation of time. I once wrote a few paragraphs that were identical to some fragments from the original *Don Quixote*, and the critics applauded me for my originality, my images evoking Bertrand Russell, William James, and others. Now my pages were a repetition, but the context differed, hence they were different. Time is healthy and continues to move along quite handily, thank you.

HLADDY: Please. Let's stick to the task at hand.

MAGGIE: I agree. Actually, I could conjure he/she for whom we are here in painful expectation up at will if I wished-I once dreamed a son, by the way. But I think it behooves us to let

him/her for whom we wait decide upon the most propitious time and place for his/her appearance.

T'SUI: Don't deceive yourself. There is an infinity of times and places. So if he/she appears at some infinitesimal time and place, we as infinitesimal beings will in all probability not know it, for who are we, helpless and hopeless souls, to know his/her designs?

ANONYMOUS: Yes. We are victims of that infinite lottery the whole of which lies eternally beyond our grasp. We are victims of the machinations of The Company.

MAGGIE: Who's that guy? Where is he?

T'SUI: I recall once having met the acquaintance of a race of people who spoke like him in some world, I believe it went by the name of Babylon.

TLÖNY: No matter.

FUNY: You mean no mind.

MAGGIE: Never mind matter, and pay no mind to mind. Essentially our duty is to ...

TLÖNY: Essentially? You're contradicting yourself again. If you could just learn to mind your Ps and Qs, and forget about what you think should be out there in the big wide world, you would find inner peace.

MAGGIE: The terror of it all, realizing all is nothing but a dream.

TLÖNY: Foul! Our dreamt worlds know of no continuity and no identity. Therefore there is actually no Averroës outside our thinking, dreaming, or perceiving him/her. Moreover, Averroës is who he/she is, and he/she brings about all that is, that is, except him/herself, who is self-perpetuating such that there can be nothing outside him/her. It is for that reason that were he/she to look at him/herself in a mirror an impossibility, by the way, since nothing can exist as something other than what he/she is—he/she would immediately disappear.

FUNY: Ave who? Where did that name come from?

TLÖNY: Oh. It must have slipped my mind. We are waiting for Averroës.

HLADDY: Somehow I sensed we were waiting for Godot.

FROM THE AUDIENCE: I would have suspected it to be Gödel. After all, the stage you lunatics have created for yourselves is, if infinite, then inconsistent, and if finite, then incomplete. What knave would presume the capacity to grasp it all? What knight would be so presumptuous as to assume she might be able to free herself for all time of the errors of her ways?

FUNY: And what bumbling fool said that? I have no faith in what I can't see before me clearly and distinctly (and even then there's this flickering transmutation of things during the very moment I see them, it's stultifying).

DANERI: Who said that, you ask? It was, if I recall correctly, one of the anguish-ridden library rats in that massive aedificium housing countless books listed in one book which is either infinite or finite, take your pick. It goes by the name of Babble or Booboo or Bumble or something to that effect. I've had trouble with the names of things ever since in a fleeting moment I experienced everything in the universe, past, present and future.

EMMY: I must say that whoever it was that said that needs a strong dose of reality to pick her up. Who cares about the big picture? All I want is to save my pride in the most pragmatic way I know how, which is to be whoever I need to be.

MAGGIE: How simple minded. Your optimism regarding your abilities is exceeded only by your self-indulgent dreams.

EMMY: You mean fictions, don't you? Unlike you, I have no need of dreams. I fabricate. Therefore my world is not the world I found, but the world I made. I can be anybody and everybody.

TLÖNY: You? Make your own world? You are hardly aware of the subtlety of the task. You simply feign, you take on the appearance of what you are not.

EMMY: I'll have you know I'm capable of convincing anyone of virtually anything. Give me a mass of people and I'll outdo even Evita Perón at her own game.

HLADDY: I insist that we attend to the issue at hand, which is our waiting for, who was it?, oh yes, Averroës, for if we tarry, our task will not have been completed and doom will surely be upon us all.

TLÖNY: Speak for yourself you hapless soul. Unlike you, I would never have suffered the humility of a death sentence in the first place, for the judge, the jury and the trial lawyers would have all been

of my own mind's making from the beginning. I could have made them judge me in whichever way I want them to.

FUNY: My world is even more simple still. Between the command given to the firing squad, their firing their rifles, and the moment the bullets reached me, I would be another me, so they would not be able to execute the person who was identical to the person they had condemned.

T'SUI: I wonder. Which intricately woven time line will Averroës ride in on? Will it be ours or that of one of our countless other selves who have in the past bifurcated toward who knows where and when.

TLÖNY: It makes no difference. When I conjure Averroës up his/her anti-self, in fact countless Averroës anti-selves, will be around dutifully to populate each and every one of the bifurcating worlds.

EMMY: I'm sorry if I sound patronizing, but you people have lost your zest for life. There's nothing like the good 'ole game of fake appearances.

MAGGIE: Listen! Do you hear someone coming?

FUNY: It's a flickering image, vague.

TLÖNY: My God! Are my mental faculties failing me? I know there should be empty space before me, for I have not consciously, conscientiously, and intentionally perceived any object. But lo!, methinks there is some appearance before me. Let it come toward me so I can grasp it and know if it is real or if I am deceived, or deceiving myself.

T'SUI: Forget appearances. Your entire empirical world is no more than mere appearances. What you need is a dozen or so years of meditation to cure you of your grand delusions of ontological edification.

HLADDY: Yes, there's definitely someone out there. And so soon too. I regret I have not yet completed my part in this dialogue.

PIERRE: What dialogue? Everything you people have said has been written since the beginning of time. I should know.

DANERI: Time? Nothing but a pain in the essence.

TLÖNY: Essence? It's of no matter, if you don't mind my saying so.

FUNY: Mind? That fabled ghost in the machine? We need no such airy nothings.

AVERROËS: Pardon me. Can anyone tell me what Aristotle meant by "tragedy" and "comedy"?

ANONYMOUS: Don't take him at his word. He's an impostor. I knew that long before I became immortal and put myself in the prone position to rest for eons upon cons, and the birds finally came to build nests on my motionless breast.

AVERROËS: Word? What word. I have neither advice nor admonishment nor good tidings. All I want to know is what that taxonomizing maniacal Greek was talking about.

DANERI: I've seen this fellow somewhere. Yes. Now I know, in the Aleph. He was juxtaposed with Bruno's burning at the stake, the Pildown man's nonexistence many centuries ago, Madonna's performance as the Material Girl, Rodney King's beating in Los Angeles, a jaguar pouncing on a helpless capybara in the wilds of Brazil, and Remedio la Bella's ascension to heaven. Why he's, he's Averroës.

IN UNISON: AVERROËS!

TLÖNY: My mind must be deceiving me.

FUNY: He's not who I thought he was, that is, is, no, was.

MAGGIE: In my wildest dreams I would never thought that he would look like no more than just another bloke.

EMMY: He's no hunk, I'll admit. But I wouldn't mind bringing a rape charge against him.

PIERRE: I could write a story about this man. Perhaps I would call it "Averroës Search."

T'SUI: It is my observation that your Western deities, if this strange being is any indication, are lacking in charisma.

HLADDY: Please. I beg of you. Forgive me Averroës, my master, and forgive my friends for their impudence. Allow me to prostrate myself before you. I feel most humble, and at the same time honored.

AVERROËS: Do you, sir, know anything about "tragedy" and "comedy"?

ANONYMOUS: He's the Antichrist! Pierce his heart with a stake, shoot him with a silver bullet beat him over the head with a cross.

LÖNNY: I don't get it. My superior inferential powers fail to account for the fact that you can be Averroës and at the same time express a concern for such trivia as "tragedy" and "comedy."

AVERROËS: I can explain it all. You see? I picked up this book at a used book store and...

ANONYMOUS: The incarnation of evil!

AVERROËS: Why don't those barbarous fanatics over there learn some manners?

HLADDY: My Lord, forgive me, no, forgive them, for they know not what they do, and lead me out of this temptation.

AVERROËS: Whew, this poor chap needs to see a shrink. Get up off your knees, will you? Anyway, the author of the book I bought wrote the whole thing with a muddled head and convoluted language—must have been a literary critic. Among other strange words, he kept referring to what he called "tragedy" and "comedy."

MAGGIE: Tell your story to Lönny. His tragic flaw landed him in a labyrinth at the other end of Scharlach's gun.

LÖNNY: It was those bloody Jews. If they had known how to compute the days of the month properly I would easily have apprehended Scharlach and he would now be in the pen where he belongs.

MAGGIE: Antisemitism is no excuse for your hypercogitating fits and errors.

ANONYMOUS: Heed my warning. He's surely a secret agent of The Company.

ANONYMOUS: Agent 666 no doubt. The end is upon us!

ANONYMOUS: Either that, or he is the Man of the Book, who holds the key to the Universe's, that is the Library's, most cherished secrets.

EMMY: Hey! All you clowns get the hell out of here and leave us alone. Can't you see Averroës is just mixed up and needs a little comforting?

AVERROËS: Thank you, and I must confess that I am quite confused.

FROM THE AUDIENCE: This is absurd. Get to the point or I want my money back.

T'SUI: I agree. Let me try to get this straight. You Westerners were in wait of someone who turned out to be Averroës who is oblivious regarding the nature of his mission. And Averroës seems to be a person with a question that all of you choose to ignore. Now, in contrast to Newton and Schopenhauer, I do not believe in a uniform, absolute time, but in an infinite series of divergent, convergent, parallel times the whole of which holds past, present and future together in a cosmic knot. In this knot we all exist, and obviously Averroës as well. Now, I know that some of my most venerable ancestors were not aware of their greatness until their life was drawing to a close. If Averroës can also be counted among these individuals who are, how do you say it? Bigger than life? Then we must aid him/her in realizing the destiny that brought him/her into our midst.

EMMY: I don't know which of me is saying this, but I think we owe it to our newcomer to listen to his story.

T'SUI: You drew the words from my mouth like water from a well.

LÖNNY: Against my better inferences, I'll go along with the proposition. Averroës, my man, er, woman?, what, pray tell, is your story?— and please don't bring up this "tragedy" and "comedy" nonsense again.

AVERROËS: How can I ignore it? The author kept repeating those words.

LÖNNY: Forget the words. Just tell us what's on your mind.

AVERROËS: You don't understand. That is what's on my mind.

HLADDY: Maybe I can help. I once wrote a play...

PIERRE: Yes, we know about all that. And I once wrote some lines identical to one of the greatest novels ever written. Averroës, on the other hand, is trying to interpret what has been written by some stranger from a strange land.

RORTY: In that case, I suggest that all we need to do is enter into the great Conversation of Humankind.

ANONYMOUS: The heretic has forced his way into your midst! He is the one who secretly rolls dice in the latrines of the innumerable hexagons of the Library. Not only has he embraced that abomi-

nable philosopher who pronounced the death of God, he has impudently spelled the death of philosophy. If we take his advice how can we ever hope to find so much as one intelligible book during all the years of our life.

T'SUI: Very interesting. I'm sure our newcomer would enjoy reading that Argentine writer, Jorge Luis Borges.

DANERI: Wait. I recognize this man who is now before us. Why, it's Richard Rorty, that notorious propagator of mirrorless minds incapable of representing an essenceless nature, that famous kibitzer who advocates incessant prattling without prioritizing or hierarchizing anyone among the prattlers and without any single prattler's ability, or the ability of the entire collection of prattlers for that matter, determinately to know anything, to solve any problems, or to arrive at an immutable consensus. When I experienced him in the *Aleph* he was chatting with groups of politicians, philosophers, literary theorists, graduate students, CEOs, little old ladies at Wal-Mart, and anyone else who would lend him an ear.²

FUNY: He sounds like my kind of person, always someone other than what he was.

EMMY: I think I've heard of him. He's that guy that doesn't like arguments, for they are not edifying. Just likes to sit around a jaw a bit. I kind of like that.

TLÖNY: But he's not one of us. Perhaps we should ban him forever.

LÖNNY: I suspect ulterior motives. Only criminals and politicians can change hats so often

HLADDY: Rumor has it that he makes a hefty salary for his amiable chit-chatting. It's not fair. Why couldn't I have enjoyed the same benefits after writing my play?

MAGGIE: I doubt that he could interpolate any of his dreamy, soporific muttering into reality. Like virtually all those egg-headed academics, he's hardly street-wise.

PIERRE: Actually, what he wrote had all been written before. He did no more than plagiarize that genuine conversation of humankind

² The verbal evocations surrounding Rorty here and below are based chiefly on his *Consequences of Pragmatism* (1982) and *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (1988); for various interpretations of Rorty see Malachowski.

philosopher, Michael Oakeshott. Unfortunately for Rorty, his task was quite inferior to my own: he read Oakeshott before rewriting him, while my eyes had never been opened to that noble Cervantes text.

HLADDY: Our Holy Father/Mother and Savior and Vacuous Spirit wrapped into a single package, our Lord and Master, Averroës, what is your wise counsel? Should we embrace this stranger or stone him until he has expelled his last life-giving breath?

AVERROËS: Let he/she who is free of the tyranny of influence cast the first stone. (By the way, has he by chance ever heard of "tragedy" and "comedy"?)

EMMY: Ha! You strike out, Pierre. You can't throw a curve stone at Rorty for you admitted to having copied Russell and James.

PIERRE: I did no such thing. It was those pompous literary critics who had nothing more to do than find similarities between texts in-textuality they called it when within the confines of their inner sanctum at their institutions; they are no better than those secret societies in Babel or Babylon.

LÖNNY: Hyperantiestablishmentarianism will not absolve you of your frailties. I suggest we allow Rorty to say his piece. If we don't let him out of our sight, I doubt he can do us any harm.

FUNY: I'm game. What do you have on your mind, or that is, what did you have on your mind that was something other than what you now have that is now becoming what you did have in order to make way for what is becoming that which you now have on your mind-Gads, it will take me at least two days to recall in my memory all that transpired today.

RORTY: I thought I'd drop by because I sympathize with Averroës's search for the inessential essence of a couple of words once jotted down by the native of an exotic culture.

HLADDY: You, a mere sinner, claiming you sympathize with our esteemed Lord and Savior? How dare you!

RORTY: Please. I want no argument. I am quite adverse to such macho tactics. Let us sit in a circle, hold hands, put on our happy faces, and chat for a spell.

EMMY: Yeah. Give the guy a chance.

RORTY: Thank you. Say, aren't you that sly lady who once took a lover in a D. H. Lawrence novel?

EMMY: Hardly.

RORTY: I'm sorry. I must have you confused with someone else.

HLADDY: Now get down to business and tell us your story or I'll put you before the firing line. You probably deserve it more than I. I was merely a victim of a devastating war. Rumor has it that you are guilty of trying singlehandedly to do away with philosophy as we knew it and put a host of college professors in the unemployment lines and make taxi drivers of young ABDs.

RORTY: I'm innocent until proven guilty. I actually believe philosophers should plead temporary insanity every time anyone catches them at their mistakes instead of their writing volumes upon volumes in an effort to expunge themselves of their wrongdoing. With such a plea, no jury would convict them, and then they could go on their way spreading good will and cheer among all peoples of all ages and creeds and tongues and races and gender and sexual orientation, and in spite of whether those people drive dilapidated Yugos or Mercedes Benzes.

FUNY: Rorty, the perpetual waffler -how could I see him as a person of fixed nature anyway? Impossible!- is changing faces with the rapidity of a coin flipped into the air. I'm losing my patience.

MAGGIE: Me too. Just get to the point.

LÖNNY: I find him quite interesting. He reminds me of my compatriots for whom philosophy is literature and hence all books must contain their own antibook.

RORTY: If you will allow me ... as I see it, Averroës's problem is this. He finds he can't distinguish between matters of fact and of definition regarding a couple of words translated from an exotic language into his own.

AVERROËS: That's it precisely! Only God and Shakespeare can be everybody and nobody. So how can I ever hope to comprehend "tragedy" and "comedy" written by the pen of Aristotle, who I am not, from another time and another place? (By the way, how do you know I'm not a woman?)

RORTY: My friend and would-be antagonist Will Quine tells me that when a native from another tribe such as Aristotle appears to agree that bachelors aren't married, we can never know

whether he is forced to say so by his own language or simply because he has never experienced anything to the contrary.

T'SUI: Bachelors? Where did they come from? Something has been lost in the translation, I fear.

EMMY: By the way Rorty darling, are you married?

LÖNNY: According to my hyperlogical inferential powers, and by Rorty's own admission, he should not even be able to understand what Quine said within his own language, let alone what Aristotle said within another one. So how can he be so smug with respect to Quine's words.

FUNY: Or for that matter he can't even understand what you are saying with your own words now, your words of a past moment, and your words of a future moment?

RORTY: The fact of the matter is that I don't really need to know. Knowledge is boring anyway, and besides, it endows those who think they possess it with inordinate power so that they can waylay us all and cheat us out of our rightful academic inheritance. In spite of what he thinks he is doing, Quine is actually just kibitzing rather than pretending he knows something. And he does so quite effectively. As a consequence, his salary reaches ever upward and his name appears on every other page of all the refereed journals.

T'SUI: But please tell us about bachelors, that is, tell us what Quine tells you about bachelors.

RORTY: To make a long story short, Quine says a stranger in his/her strange language might say "Gavagai" when it appears that he/she is looking in the direction of a bachelor. But how can we know "Gavagai" is the equivalent of "Bachelor" in our language? It might mean "A determinate set of sex parts," "A rather chunky lad," "An ageing yuppie," or even "A particular space-time slice from the four dimensional continuum."

FUNY: That's only part of our problem. Five minutes from now he/she will be someone other than what he/she now is. So our stranger could then call him "Gavagao," and in another five minutes, "Gavagau," then "Gavagoe," then "Gavagoi," and so on. It's an uncertain world you know.

TLÖNY: Not only that, but I could conjure him up as a "green Gavagai," you as a "Grue Gavagai," T'sui as a "Blue Gavagai," Lönnny as a

"Bleen Gavagai," Emmy as a "Grange Gavagai," Maggie as a "Oreen Gavagai." There's no end to the possible attributes we can endow him/her with. The language we use and the ethereal mental objects to which they refer could all become as confusing as they are in my beloved planet for which I cherish sweet longings.³

PIERRE: Good Lord! With those precedents how could I ever again hope to write a few fragments identical to a previously existing text?

Tsui: Besides, "Gavagai" brings terrible memories of "Samurai." We fought those people bitterly for decades, you know.

RORTY: Oh dear. I see I've opened Pandora's box.

ANONYMOUS: I warned all of you. He brings evil!

LÖNNY: Speaking of boxes, I just thought of a magnificent labyrinth for Scharlach the next time we meet. It consists of stairways going up or down or to the right or to the left, depending on the eye of the beholder. I'd have him coming and going.

DANERI: Escher already constructed that one you clout. It's called "Relativity." I gazed upon it in the Aleph.

ANONYMOUS: That's nothing. I once saw an object capable of every one of your variations on a theme. It consisted of an ordinary coin worth twenty cents, but it had been many things besides: a tiger, a blind man, an astrolabe, a compass, a vein in a marble pillar, the bottom of a well, and in fact, it had been, was, and could have been an infinity of things.

TLÖNY: Elementary my dear fellow. Why, on my planet we can lose coins and then proceed to find them whenever and wherever we wish.

EMMY: Hey! Let's have a little respect for Rorty. After all, he, along with Averroës, is our guest.

T'SUI: Whatever happened to Averroës anyway?

RORTY: I thank you once again, mam. You see? Whatever might be the meaning of "Gavagai," that meaning does not determine the

³ I should point out that the apparently bizarre terms I have pecked out on the keyboard did not pop out of the clear blue. "Gavagai" is Quine's own invention, for the play on "Grue" and "Blue" I pay due respects to Nelson Goodman's (59-83) notorious "New Riddle of Induction" and allusion to "cats" and "cherries" a few lines down is a variation of a thought-experiment created by Hilary Putnam (1-25).

reference of the word to the thing, nor does the thing cause reference to the word, nor is the word a "rigid designator" of the thing as Saul Kripke tells us.

MAGGIE: You've lost me there.

RORTY: Oh, excuse me. I'll stick to the basics. When Averroës says "I'd like to know the meaning of 'tragedy' and 'comedy'" it sounds like he wants hard-rock foundations of meanings fixed onto words for all time. Actually, there is no absolutely determinate reason for believing in solid physical reality any more than in Homer's gods or in figments of the imagination.

TLÖNY: Hear! Hear!

ANONYMOUS: Beware. He now spreads pagan doctrine.

RORTY: If we could all get together in good faith and engage in amiable talk with open minds it doesn't matter of what the world is made or of what, ultimately, human nature consists of. Just talking the talk will ultimately make us free.

FUNY: I was born free, but afterward, everywhere I went language staked its claims.

TLÖNY: Don't flatter yourself. You never tasted a morsel of freedom in your life.

RORTY: But if we just amicably talk...

EMMY: Talk ends bachelor life and turns young girls' hearts from dolls to diamonds. A nice old man once told me it can even transform emeralds from "green" to "grue" and give first-grade numb-skulls the idea that "cats" are "cherries." I find nothing liberating about talk.

PIERRE: Contrary to what you all probably believe, my liberating scripts are prior to talk, which is oppressively phonocentric and author of the myth of presence, of phallogocentrism.

ANONYMOUS: Yes, I know. In the beginning was a sacred cipher, which I once contemplated on a Jaguar's hide.

T'SUI: He/she who knows talks not; he/she who talks knows not.

RORTY: My God! You're all hopelessly mad! How did I ever think I could free you of your fallacies?

MAGGY: Averroës? Is that you again? Did you appear out of the clear blue or am I dreaming? Why is your hair so ruffled, your eyes

glazed and blood-shot. And, now that you have drawn near I notice that your breath smells of stale coffee.

IN UNISON: AVERROËS!

HLADDY: Your present countenance is unbecoming of you, my Master.

FUNY: Wait a minute. He can't be Averroës. I've never seen this bum in my life.

AVERROËS: Yes, it is I. I have been travelling far and wide in cyberspace while you've been wasting your time kibitzing. It gives me great pleasure to announce to you that I discovered a gentleman who claims he knows of Aristotle.

[Jorge Luis Borges appears, standing in the hallway which opens into the room where all are gathered.]

PIERRE: I remain unimpressed.

DANERI: How can this be? This man was nowhere to be found in that golf ball sized apparition containing the entire universe I once contemplated.

MAGGIE: I think he's dreaming.

RORTY: The face looks familiar. If I recall correctly, he was either a fabulist who tried to write the end of philosophy or a philosopher who tried to write fables with no end. (I hope he can talk to us in a language capable of bringing order to this mayhem.)

T'SUI: End? How could there be any end? The infinitely converging and diverging bifurcating time lines double back on themselves and eat their own tail to abolish time for all time. This foreigner among us was doomed from the beginning if he might ever have thought time is the substance he is made of, that it is a river that sweeps him along, that it is a tiger which destroys him but that he is the tiger, that it is a fire which consumes him but that he is the fire, that the world is unfortunately real or that he is unfortunately who he is. This man can lay no better claim to existence or to essence than can we. As my ancestors taught me: we should never place stock in mere appearances.

[At that moment our newly arrived guest unwittingly happens to turn his head in the direction of a mirror in the hallway, and as his expressionless eyes blankly meet themselves, he vanishes, as do Tlöny and

Funy and Hladdy and Lönny and Maggie and T'sui and Emmy and Pierre and Daneri and Averroës and Rorty and those anonymous souls and the audience and the furniture and floor and walls and ceiling and the very mirror reflecting itself an infinite number of times in the adjacent mirror on the other side of the hallway. And space collapses and with it time, to leave that infamous singularity, that infinitesimally minuscule point in space, the marvellously real Aleph, which evinces premonitions of an impending Big Bang and eons upon eons of expansion and a Great Crunch and then a Big Bang and eons upon eons of expansion, ... and so on. And through it all the rip-roaring laughter of that fleet-footed dancer nimbly springing from mountain peak to mountain peak, Friedrich Nietzsche, pierces the hoary void. In the end, however, everybody had the time of their lives and the freedom to exhaust all possible repertoires of nonsensical talk, and all was well, for after all was said and done there was no conceivable end.]

Floyd Merrell
Purdue University

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