

Post-Contemporary

Interventions

Series Editors

Stanley Fish and

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# Lucchesi and The Whale

by Frank Lentricchia



Duke University Press Durham and London 2001

I

The Nostalgic Man in Crisis

but marked by their owners with coded dyes: a slash of red, or indigo, over the shoulders, flaring out like blood through the steaming mist. Sheep to humans: 800 to 1, a ratio that pleases Lucchesi greatly. He makes a note of it. Principal import: alcoholic beverages, of course. Lucchesi adds to the fact: "and countless reams of typing paper, so that the humans can fight back against the fucking sheep." Coastal topography: drowned river valleys.

Long ago, East Falkland served as a whaling station, the last before the tall ships, mainly American, in penetrating enterprise rounded Cape Horn and made for the Marquesas, Tahiti, and the rich Japanese cruising grounds: And Lucchesi delights to imagine him there, Melville, of course, ruddiest of writers, strolling in the Malvinas! Strolling beaches of white quartz sand and suddenly seized by impulse, stripping, and plunging out of sight into the frigid surf, to dare the giant kelp coils: Look! Melville's swimming too far out, he's diving too deep! Herman! Don't come up! There! There it is again, the bold bearded head bobbing among the white caps, to stare down blank dramatic sea cliffs, and the vast rolling moors of this awful waste.

In a geographical survey of the saints, he finds it: Saint Malo. Named for a Welsh monk who had fled to Brittany in the sixth century to escape persecution: *Maclou*, which became in modern French, *Malo*. Nothing to do with evil, everything to do with silence and rejection of the world which insisted on taking an interest in the monk. Lucchesi smiles in his cold room. Writes: "Am I not, in a way, more like Christ than I am like Scrooge? Have

I not renounced all for Art? The Scrooge-Christ of Art, who has hoarded his self to Writing the Father. *And* not gained the world. Because who buys his books? *And* lost his soul. Wherein lie all my profits?"

Lucchesi feels very good. No chance he'll weep now. Raises window high to let in a blast of icy air. Inhales deep. The heat had long gone down, and now the electrical power goes too, and he's in the dark, in the House of Books, without a single candle, just as he was about to begin new work at last, the first sentences stirring in his mind. He'll have to write in the mind. In the dark, in his mind: "Writing is taking place." [Revises:] "Writing takes the place. In the Malvinas, something fast in the white grass. Arms up. Racing with her arms up, fists clenched, hair whipped back in the wind, a black streak through white grass. Secret, self-contained, solitary: We take the place, Malvina and I."

He'll memorize it. Revise in the mind through the night. Memorize the revision, waiting for dawn. Happy in his unredeemed state. No doubt about it: quite happy.

Time to tear the telephone from the wall.

### 3 · The Fan Club

Thomas Lucchesi finds himself on the busiest street corner in his hometown, where he sees a woman in the far distance come running, directly at him she comes, with something in her hand. She closes in, pointing something, haggard and middle-aged. He

Hello. They've never spoken; he's too much in love to speak. He prefers to think, scheme, imagine. Now, for example, of creating a path of 8½ by 11 pages of white typing paper. From his back door, through the garden, around the cherry tree, over the fence, into her yard, to her back door. On each piece, drawn in flaming red crayon, a fat bold arrow pulling her initials. All the arrows pointing in the same direction: From her door to his. He smiles a little. Even at sixteen, he's capable (somewhat) of smiling at his passion. And yet, he enjoys it so much, languishes, really, in the thought of his passivity. How he loves the vision! She'll come running over the untrodden white pages. From some terror, she'll come running into his strong arms, drawn irresistibly by his first work of literature.

Remembers something beautiful he'd read in a book. His most enjoyable and useless ideas come from books. An Italian named Calvino had written about a boy who lived in trees, never coming to earth. Doing everything in the trees. Everything. He, Tom junior, could leap from the porch to the cherry tree. It could be done. Walk over the thick limbs that lean into her yard. Lure her up, then make love to her, as the great boughs shake and shudder. Tumescence he stands, staring and resentful.

Runs fingers over his acne; feels the urge to throw rocks; get her attention with rocks. Because, as his playground friends always said: "Tommy, what an arm you got!" Then they'd recount his amazing feat, three summers ago, he, a skinny thirteen year old, the smallest of the players, standing in medium deep cen-

ter field in a pick-up softball game with a number of big kids, when a fly ball is hit high to him in the bottom of the ninth, his team ahead by one run, the bases loaded, one out, he's backing up a step or two to catch the ball and the big fast kid on third base is tagging up and bolting toward home for the tying run as young Tom rears back gripping the big soft ball almost too big for his hand and fires it—a frozen rope, a rocket all the way home on the fly and the big kid is out by a mile! On the back porch, he's calling back his pleasure, the act of firing his rocket-throw home, the gymnastic follow-through nearly spinning him head over heels, he'd almost left his whirling body behind. Is he remembering? Is this what is called memory? That day three summers ago, he'd whirled out to the edge of himself, but had not succeeded in throwing himself beyond himself. Now, staring through the cherry tree, young Tom crosses the line: he revises the past. Sees himself on the playing field in the follow-through actually cartwheeling and feels launched to a place of ecstatic freedom: whirling on the back porch into the embrace of imagination, and requited love at last.

Certainly, from the porch, he could do it. Fire high, so high the first rock, quickly followed by two others fired less high so that all three missiles could rain down thunder on her roof, one two three. That would get her attention. He conjures a different image: she and her parents sitting complacently, sunning themselves in their backyard, when his terrible swift rocks come raining down upon their heads. The rocks, attached to long, long

anti-story: end-free; useless seed; the irresponsible pleasure of the page, answering only to the writer's (and the writer-in-the-reader's) love of the exploding volcano of metaphor:

"In a week or so, I go to New York, to bury myself in a third-story room, and work and slave on my 'Whale' while driving it through the press. *That* is the only way I can finish it now,—I am so pulled hither and thither by circumstances. The calm, the coolness, the silent grass-growing mood in which a man *ought* always to compose,—that, I fear, can seldom be mine. Dollars damn me; and the malicious Devil is forever grinning in upon me,—and I shall at last be worn out and perish. . . . What I feel most moved to write, that is banned,—it will not pay. Yet, altogether write the *other* way I cannot. So the product is a final hash, and all my books are botches."

1. Goes to NYC, city of his birth.
2. To perish by the cause of unfree writing, in the service of a publishing factory.
3. To drive the writing he goes, to be driven.
4. The final chapters of the book. The Chase of the White Whale. The so-called most exciting part. In the cemetery of NYC.
5. The end of a story and his end. (I have nothing else to say.)
6. Not free not to drive the story. (Sickening to state it otherwise: he's free to drive the story.)
7. Needs to eat; pay bills; has a family that needs to eat. Finish the story, Herman.

8. Death by obligations to family.
9. Where is his love of family? The doing for love? Where is mine? Have you forgotten already? I have no family.
10. Cannot write forever to the organic (grass-growing) rhythms of what he composes. (He's gone to NYC!) Grass, which grows slowly, sometimes; sometimes quickly; always imperceptibly.  
What are you doing Herman?  
I'm watching the grass grow.  
Get a grip on yourself.  
(Where has Herman's self gone, when he doesn't have a grip on it?)
11. Grass-growing composition as banned composition, but by whom? Or what? Not as in "banned in Boston," for obscenity.
12. Drive the story! Grass-growing writing will not pay. Banned in part by the culture of capital; in part by himself, who is not free not to give into the culture. (Sickening: he's free to give into the culture.)
13. He is the banner and he is not.
14. He's implicated. Dirty Herman.
15. Can't give in totally either to the culture or to himself. Saving alternatives: not his alternatives.
16. Must bury himself. He must.
17. His books (especially M-D) are necessary botches; confusing mixtures of story and antistory.
18. To die in NYC, by his own hand.
19. The hand that writes, that feels the substance of the page through the penholder and the nib.

man named Lucchesi, offered “poignant testimony” of Wittgenstein’s “deepest humanity.” LW’s worst fear, they concluded, was ungrounded. His dark “forest of remarks” did, after all, “both engage and improve” the life of an ordinary man.

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May 19

Dear Wilhelm

After the traditional game of touch football, a stranger in his mid-forties, who introduced himself as Thomas Lucchesi, stood before me in a torrent of intensity and explained that the way we had spent the afternoon was so vile that we ought not to live, or at least he ought not to live, that nothing is tolerable except producing great works, which he could not produce, though he had tried, or enjoying those of others, but that he had seen all the great paintings, listened to all the great music, read all the great literature, and therefore was no longer capable of “orgasmic enjoyment,” therefore etcetera. I suggested that he might cease seeking substitutes for sex and he responded in an absolutely dead tone: “Sex.” The force with which the man spoke nearly knocked me down. I felt trivial; I *was* trivial. I also felt, and do feel, depressed, not only because of Mr. Lucchesi’s painful (and oddly thrilling) scorn, but because I know that you continue to see Charles, though I’ve broken it off with Jennifer.

I suspect, by the way, that “Thomas Lucchesi” is a pseudonym.

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May 20

Jennifer darling

Today, a powerfully built man named Lucchesi, who exudes sadness—he is one of the many mad amateurs attracted by our annual meetings of mad Wittgensteinians—approached to inform me that our touch football games desecrated LW’s memory. That we ought to invent a game; call it Wittgenstein; or call it Game; so that all who play and all who spectate will be unavoidably aware of the purely conventional, site-specific function of the players within the rule-driven context of the game itself. As he insanely put it, the players “above all must be relentlessly aware of themselves as grammatical functions, even while they play, who signify, in themselves, nothing at all.” I suggested to Mr. Sadness that when we play we like to throw ourselves in whole hog. Forget everything, including LW’s idea of the language-game. That all the fun lies in forgetting oneself. He said, “Only in death. In death do I trust.” At which point I recalled that when LW was told that he had but a day or two to live, he said “Good.” I recalled this but did not pass it on to Mr. Lucchesi.

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May 21

Gianni *Mio!*

Of course I do not “see” Vittoz and trust that you have “relinquished” Virog. Virog is so *rough*. Let the sex-game end. Please. We are each other’s Apostle, are we not?