

## Assumption: from reminiscences to surprise, from dream to nightmare

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“‘Funny,’ Lewis said, ‘the things we assume.’”  
(Percival Everett, “Wolf at the door”, *Pig Picture*,  
1996.)

“I felt small for having let my preconceptions get the  
better of me.” (Percival Everett, “Alluvial deposits”,  
*damnedifido*, 2004.)

Reading the short story “Wash” (1996), the words “pinacate bug” made me, a foreigner not attuned to New Mexico wild life, rush to the dictionary<sup>1</sup>. So, opening *Assumption* carried me back to that story’s beginning. To the dichotomy between the high and low desert, the danger of a flash flood, fire and death by water alongside with rattlesnakes, and also to a dead black father cursing his half-white son<sup>2</sup>.

Reading on, the name Bickers<sup>3</sup> also rang a bell: Ms. Bickers is an old lady who hates black people in “Alluvial Deposits” (2004).

The Marotta episode reminds the reader of “Warm and Nicely Buried” where Fragua (Ogden’s fellow deputy) also appears. One can recall an almost similar situation (a stolen dead body) in *The Body of Martin Aguilera* where one also encounters the added ingredient of a double dealing FBI agent, as in *Watershed*.

Minor *Assumption* characters and situations also carry you back to earlier stories. For instance, you run twice into Rick and Manny, Lucien Bradley’s former school friends in “Wash”. From “Thirty-Seven to Take a Fall” comes the memory of the foolish kidnapping of a dangerous dog on an impulse to take it away from a dog fight arena in *The Weather and Women Treat Me Fair*, 1987. The truck with four asphyxiated bodies in it has an ancestor in “Esteban”, in the same collection. Borrowing from earlier-published works may have been intentional or simply have surged from, in Charles Baudelaire’s words in *Les Paradis artificiels*, “the huge and contorted palimpsest of memory” [71]<sup>4</sup>. There are no exact matches from one work to the next as both the characters and the events they are involved in are inflected to suit the new narrative’s purpose. The most relevant question is the role of those returning people and situations in the reader’s own palimpsest —when aware that there do exist predecessors.

That most reminiscences occur in part one of *Assumption* is intriguing. After closing the book, I wondered why these elements fall into place that way and reasoned they induced the illusion I was treading familiar territory, that Ogden’s personality (to use the new name) was a known, reliable entity.

I typed side by side the openings of “Wash” and *Assumption* to compare them more closely. This exercise appears below as an appendix, should the need arise.

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<sup>1</sup>This insect also dubbed “stink bug” somehow connects with Beetle whom Ogden shoots when the quiet of the desert gives way to pandemonium.

<sup>2</sup>A black Noah cursing his half-white descendent.

<sup>3</sup>The new Mrs. Bickers in *Assumption* is much more noisome than the earlier foolish old bigot.

<sup>4</sup>“l’immense et compliqué palimpseste de la mémoire” [my own translation].

Both passages begin with a young man playfully bothering a harmless bug<sup>5</sup> and ultimately bring up the spectre of a flash flood with a drowned man on a par with drowned rattlers, but they fulfill different narrative functions. The opening of “Wash” is directly organic, builds an acquaintance from scratch. That of *Assumption* is no standard self-supporting character sketch opening a story. Detached as it is from the main body of the narrative thread, it creates a time and narrative gap separating the two characters. Besides, Ogden, the new character, is reconfigured. About ten lines have been deleted, a change that turns Ogden into a nicer son, a not so high-strung young man who has enjoyed not so bad a relationship with his outspoken now dead father. Ogden is also more secure: he has a job as deputy sheriff. Lucien Bradley simply is a young fellow just out the army. Both are turning a page of their life book. However, Ogden’s life seems much less definite: he is glad something is over, but what that something is remains hidden. It could be an investigation, a bad love affair, a severed friendship, anything. What emerges is the impression some tense or difficult situation is over and Ogden is going back to daily life, quieter times... thanks to the “desert wind” (4), away from fellow human beings.

The research group I participate in have been working around Jacques Rancière’s theories according to which art and politics are consubstantial because art’s nature is social. Rancière formed his theory on the inter-relationship between politics and aesthetics from the basic disagreement between Jean-Paul Sartre’s question in “Qu’est-ce que la littérature?” and Roland Barthes’s answer in “Le Degré zéro de l’écriture”.

To Rancière, their difference amounted to an unneeded creation of categories. He therefore proposed to approach art through “le partage du sensible”<sup>6</sup>, that is to say a matrix that defines the relations between sensibility and sense —i.e. between sensory experience and an interpretation that makes sense of it (Rockhill & Watts, 275, 279).

Good literature does not engage in politics by providing messages. A book’s politics is not the writer’s, at least not didactically expressed as such. Politics work their way in through an aesthetic experience that absorbs the represented places, objects, animals, people, etc., and makes them lose their primary representative function to be relocated in art and thus become available for the enjoyment and/or enlightenment of the text’s visitors.

Rancière further builds a distinction between “police power” and “politics”, in which the former is the smooth and broadly accepted general expectation which the latter questions or dissents from. This, together with the novel’s configuration (from the illusion one knows who Ogden is, that is to say a troubled but mostly nice person to the final surprise), made me think one could read *Assumption* with Rancière’s theories in mind.

*Assumption* begins with “A difficult Likeness”, set in a world mostly in keeping with “police power”. All the delinquents hide their game well. Ogden is no genius but a reliable and devoted deputy sheriff —although he feels he is “not cut out for [his] work” (132). He also is a nice gullible person who assumes Jenny, the original victim’s daughter is trustworthy. He goes all the way to assist her, even spends his own money to

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<sup>5</sup>Why do that? Perhaps, as Ogden tells Warren about the murders he carried out, “Pretty much because I could...” (224).

<sup>6</sup>The “distribution of the sensible” in Gabriel Rockhill’s 2004 translation of Rancière’s essay, *Le Partage du sensible: esthétique et politique*.

fill her car tank up. In the end, the hick town<sup>7</sup> sheriff bureau, grass roots America, puts things right and a traitorous FBI agent is dispatched. The reader feels snugly at home in a world that runs according to conventions. Good prevails over evil. Both the reader and Ogden can thank “the desert wind that it was all over”, (4). Life can go back to normal and the book open onto a new development.

*Assumption*'s second section, “My American Cousin” borrows from the title of a farcical comedy<sup>8</sup> mostly remembered for a fateful performance during which Abraham Lincoln was murdered —when worth and tolerance, so goes conventional history, were executed by a bigot. Plenty of nonsensical fun opens that part: Ogden’s “morning tea-for-one” follows the song heard on the radio, “Tea for Two”. He goes out though his “front and only door”, has trouble starting his rig’s “temperamental engine” (99). This jocose mood carries on with Maggie Muddy’s strong-willed hollyhocks that won’t grow where she wants them to (104-106). The billboard of Manny’s Appliance Depot (M.A.D.) represents Manny with microwave ovens for his eyes and a deep freeze for his mouth (107-109) also provides a hilarious moment. Ogden remains his equal self, a pleasant young man, a deputy sheriff who dislikes violence and guns, and whose growing dedication makes him run high risks on his own in Denver’s criminal jungle when he drives up there in pursuit of information. Detective Barry calls him a “messiah”, which is his “natural disposition”, he admits (161). Fragua later adds on to that, jokes his wife and daughter believe Ogden can do no wrong and his daughter finds him cute, an opinion he does not share, he quips on, agreeing Ogden does have a “messiah complex” (163). In the end, for the first time, Ogden takes his weapon on a self-assumed mission up the mountain—hoping to save the last of the scheming prostitutes from murder. He succeeds and, for the first time, uses his weapon to shoot the ring leader in the shoulder. Fragua and Becky, fat, but definitely not the slothful sheriff one assumed him to be, arrive on the spot and help him make the arrests. Conventional ethics once again triumph. “Police power” still reigns, though not quite so reassuringly. Ogden who feels he is “not cut out for this job” (132), seems more perturbed this time: he declares to his mother that people scare him. To which Eva answers, “They should, son.” (172)

Rural peacefulness prevails as the third section titled “The Shift” opens on a quiet beginning: after fishing on his day off (in fact he put the trout back in) Ogden is quietly eating a sandwich next to a trout hatchery, a “parking lot of fish” (173). He is joined by Terry Lowell, a game warden. The two men talk about their professions. Terry who went to school in Texas speaks of his love for the region around Plata. Ogden voices his dissatisfaction with the army. Terry performs a smart arrest: Ogden had not paid attention to a man fishing from the hatchery. However, this stable world crumbles after the young lad whose poaching uncle has been arrested vanishes from the sheriff office. When Terry’s body is found, killed by a bullet ballistic experts trace back to Ogden’s service weapon, Ogden finds himself brutally in trouble, a suspected murderer. Sheriff Bucky allows him to stay on the job and his search for the youth brings him into contact with the local drug trade, a methane lab, as well as derelict drug users who live from hand to mouth in a sort of hippie commune. An unexpected turn occurs, as the title promises. Nice young Ogden turns into an exterminator of people who flout the law, a miserable drug user as well as makers and pushers. Ogden is described gun in hand. As seen by the investigators, the carnage is ugly, terrifying. Worse, it turns out at the last

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<sup>7</sup>Ogden loves the land but shares his dead father’s poor opinion of little respect for the “hick-full, redneck county” (3).

<sup>8</sup>One may remember the main character in the play is a good-hearted New Englander, whose generosity is far removed from the three prostitutes’ greed for money that leads them to their violent deaths.

moment that Ogden has indeed murdered Terry, the game warden, to hide an earlier murder of a poacher. He is even ready to shoot Fragua, his loyal colleague (and fellow fly fisherman) who never harmed him. “Police power” has utterly collapsed.

The now defunct state of “police power” leads me to venture into my vision of the book’s “politics”. I would first like to propose the idea the story, notch by notch, withdraws from the terrain we took for granted at the outset. Unlike the earlier stories from which some of the characters and situations in the first part are drawn, the ground is never firm under the reader’s feet in *Assumption* because the settings and the characters’ doings lack substance. The three parts are undated, Ogden loses “track of time” (202) and the episodes only go from cold winter to hot August and back to a winter’s especially vicious weather.

The text’s removal from a solidly referential world as we know it begins in a small way in the first part with the presence of the crooked FBI special agent. FBI agents are expected to be reliable and law-abiding. Here is one who belongs among a rabid hate group ready to murder to find a list of ten-digit numbers. Were it not for violent death lurking around, the hate group would add up to a laughable troop of amateurs, haphazardly digging holes in a 90-acre patch of land to retrieve a document supposedly buried in a tin box, but that has been sitting under the blind eyes of an aged member. This part leaves a taste of unfinished business. Will action be taken against the hate group thanks to the precious (presumably membership) list? Fragua’s intervention to rescue Ogden and his mother at the end rings ironical on reaching the third part when Ogden tells Fragua, his colleague and fellow-fly fisherman, he is afraid he must shoot him.

Ogden’s almost single-handed investigation in Denver, advised but not assisted by the local police is strange, or not in keeping with usual practice<sup>9</sup>. Then, his escape from the van is short of a miracle. The ubiquity of the fast-travelling gangsters and their extreme violence leave many *realistic* strands out. “Three lives for twelve thousand dollars... I guess it wasn’t about the money,” Ogden says to his mother before concluding it must have been a matter of power for the local drug pusher (172). Ogden’s post-inquest feelings add to the reader’s sense of otherworldliness. His thinking is, to say the least, disconnected from the earlier investigation which wasn’t a matter of three lives for a meagre twelve thousand dollars, but seven casualties (plus a cat) for a useless list—a relic from the past judging from the ages of some of the protagonists.

Ogden sheds the personality the reader had attributed him in “The Shift”. All assumptions prove wrong as the world turns surreal and the ground constantly shifts from under one’s feet. Killing Terry is one thing; but what murderer in their right mind would keep their weapon dirty? The elusive vanishing boy whom no one has seen in the Sheriff’s office is another textual vortex: what uncle would drive sixty miles and probably as many back<sup>10</sup>, unasked, to pick up his nephew to go fishing/poaching? Another less visible element is that Ogden’s usually apt enough questioning runs off track when he asks inept questions to a woman living in the yurts (198). Lastly, the drive on scary slippery back roads with Beetle (the drug addict) in his truck caps it all with the dizziness it provokes. Ogden is still investigating but drives away from the

<sup>9</sup>Why Sheriff Bucky allows Ogden to drive from Plata to Denver is unclear. There is no definite rule when an investigation takes officers away from their home county. While officers can investigate far from their base, it is more usual for the local office to take care of the work themselves or provide full assistance. (See <http://www.sAssumptionshley.com/Assumptionarticles/jurisdiction.com> : consulted Feb. 5, 2013.)

<sup>10</sup>This is the distance between Embudo and Eagle Neck.

main roads like a fugitive. His feet are no longer touching the truck's floor and nausea threatens. Is he floating on a nightmare induced by dyspepsia? Or by the fear of a flash flood drowning campers and wild life? If that is so, the nightmare continues after Bucky's bullet kills him: the extra diegetic narrator writes that Fragua does not recognize his friend's face.

Let us now turn to the "politics" I fancy I can read into the story. In a novel conforming to "police power", art is thoroughly politicized in so far as contents and form didactically match. *Assumption* does not follow any such model.

If we follow Rancière's theory in *La Parole muette*, art is born from the tension between the primacy of representation and the forces, or needs of expression (122). In other words, the rules of representation are broken as the story's politics reformat the poetic hierarchy<sup>11</sup>.

If we read *Assumption* as a political nightmare, people, objects and places turn immaterial and the story projects itself beyond representation. Here is the book's "punctum" for me: as a reader whose interest has consistently focused on sociocriticism, *Assumption* strikes me as an unspoken comment on two of American society's sores: race to begin with, and, mostly, violence—criminal first, then perpetrated by a law enforcement officer who takes justice into his own hands.

"A Difficult Likeness" focuses on race. First dealt with sarcastically through the remark that Ogden's now dead father hated white people, but "not enough to restrain himself from marrying one" (13). Sarcasm is one thing, Ogden's existential difficulty, feeling his father hated half of him, is another. *Assumption* is no run of the mill protest novel. Spanish American Warren Fragua has no problem being who he is and blackness is just a fact of life to Ogden. For instance, he does not seem offended when the police officer warns him away from German Town, a tough place, "Especially for someone like you. Being out of town and," he paused, "black like that" (86). Above all, there is the hate group, repugnant people who are mostly dealt with satirically: blind and crazy Lester G. Robbins's boasts he "can smell a nigger" (90), but misses an opportunity to exercise his olfactory talent when Ogden visits him in the retirement home.

"My American Cousin" briefly, jokingly, touches on race when Ogden speaks to detective Hailey Barry who comes out with her (probably) ready-made pun on actress Halle Berry's name (137). But race plays no significant background as that part is steeped in a form of violence that shifts from bigotry to the lust for money.

If neglect of the non-smoking rules in public places makes non-smokers "reek of cigarettes" (110), rampant social curses like racism and violence equally rub on citizens and corrupt them. An Ogden who declares he doesn't "like violence" (163) and had rather not carry a gun is out of place in the American social landscape<sup>12</sup>. So is Fragua who goes out at night, unarmed, to find the hideout of an armed deputy sheriff, his

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<sup>11</sup>Could "Unspoken Speech" be accepted as a translation of *La Parole muette*? The text doesn't speak; the reader builds meaning. Rancière may have been inspired by Roland Barthes's *La Chambre claire*. Barthes's essay probes the matter of photography's status between representation and art: "What I feel for these photos stems from a common affect, almost a training. I could not find a simple French word to express this human interest, but there exists such a word in Latin, I think: that's 'studium' which does not mean, at least not immediately, 'study'—but applying it to something, one's taste for somebody, a sort of general investment, assiduous to be sure but not particularly acute. [...] The second element breaks, or stresses the studium. This time around, I do not seek it (as I consciously do to explore the field of the studium). It breaks away from the scene, like an arrow, to tear into me. A Latin word exists to describe this wound, this bruise provoked by a sharp instrument... I will call punctum this second element that comes in to disturb studium, because punctum also means sting, small hole, small stain, small cut—and also casting the dice. A photo's punctum is that grain of chance in it that points at me (but also grips me hurts me)." (Barthes, 48-49, my own translation.)

colleague, suspected to be a multi murderer. Luckily for him, fat and placid Bucky, once again more hands-on than previously suspected to be, has followed him. Bucky shoots at Ogden without any warning. Even though legitimate as Fragua was in direct danger, Bucky's decision is clearly a case of "shoot first and ask questions later". He might have advertised his presence and arrested Ogden. But what might have happened in the real world (if or when officers do respect life) cannot be in a nightmare that harks of a death wish. Guns are an American nightmare that haunts *Assumption* and many other Everett fictions. They for instance come up, tongue-in-cheek, in fictional Charlton Heston's mouth<sup>13</sup> speculating on Herbert Hoover as a likely gun owner in *Percival Everett by Virgil Russell*: "Americans, everyone of us, should have a gun." (96)

The new brutal Ogden who exterminates criminals and a miserable drug user in the same bloodbath steps across the border—but is perhaps not quite out of place in a society that lives by the gun. As a character, he reads like a political lesson: a two-way mirror for a violent society to look at itself and recall Amidou Diallo, Henry Dumas or Trayvon Martin among others<sup>14</sup>. "The Shift" takes the reader along into a descent among the lowest most miserable strata of a society that shuts its eyes on destitution and law breaking (192). Evil, the anagram of "live" is everywhere, as Ogden says to Fragua: "I'm an evil man. *Live* is *evil* spelled backward or is it the other way around?" (225). Beetle wears "flip-flops that [don't] match" (202), possibly read as one of the numerous symbols of a disconnected world where nothing makes sense. Here, *Assumption* looks backward to many an earlier Everett story, as a sentence from "Wash" underlines: "Most things don't make any sense." (*Big Picture*, 108)

Bucky's shot possibly is the moment when the novel comes full circle. It makes the reader go back to the opening piece, to the young Deputy setting camp at the outset. An ambivalent passage beginning with a thought of his loving mother and ending with his eyes closed, meeting death by water in a dry place, thanking "the desert wind that it was all over." (4) Perhaps he sees a flash at the moment Bucky's bullet hits him —glad his killing binge is over. Or perhaps this is the moment when he awakes from a nightmare provoked by his fear of weapons. A nightmare that went from bad to worse and, worst of all, involved the fear a harmless citizen might be corrupted by weapons.

My reading of the politics of *Assumption* adds up to an indictment of American Society. The novel offers an inexorable march to the moment when death—or awakening—is a welcome relief from a nightmare. Perhaps my assumption goes too far. However, I feel the hypothesis of a continuous dream is reasonably strong not only because events shift increasingly out of focus with the real world<sup>15</sup>, but also because

<sup>12</sup>Is Ogden really a violent man, or simply an illustration of the danger of becoming one as society's violence rubs on him? Is he a two-faced Janus, or just obsessed by the fear wearing a gun is liable to lead to firing it?

<sup>13</sup>The movie artist is known to be a staunch supporter of the N.R.A.

<sup>14</sup>Amidou Diallo was shot by four police officers —41 rounds of ammunition, 19 hits— in his apartment building hallway. Poet Henry Dumas was shot in the back by a New York Transit Authority police officer—a case of mistaken identity. Trayvon Martin was shot in the name of the first "Stand Your Ground" law Florida passed in 2005. Twenty-four more states have followed suit so far. Ogden's case is different: apart from Terry, a collateral victim, he kills lawbreakers: a poacher, a drug addict and three men involved in the trade.

<sup>15</sup>Careful perusing helps build up the impression of a world that is out of joint. Three instances follow. First, when the narration shifts from Ogden's doings and thoughts to focus on Fragua's investigation, Fragua is reported looking for Ogden's dog (216-217). Although Ogden does mention throwing sticks for his dog (137), the animal never is seen. Second, when Beetle awakes from his drugged sleep as Ogden's truck drops down a shelf, he is said to "for the first time [show] **some kind of concern for something in**

dreams frame the novel: on returning exhausted from his homecoming fishing, Ogden dreams he is fishing in high water that seeps into his chest-high waders. The current is strong but doesn't push him: "he [feels] stable, foot sure and steady." (23). The wind that whips around doesn't affect his expert casts either, but the huge trout he is trying to tempt disdainfully ignores his bait as it flies before its nose. Although that dream sequence ends in frustration, Ogden's sense of stability and sure-handedness prevails — very much unlike his feelings during the slippery and precipitous drive on mountain back roads that precedes the murders in the drug dealer's sprawling adobe. Two more significant nightmares come up in the closing part: Ogden, shovel in hand and pulling his gun on Terry (189), then Ogden talking to Terry, again shovel in hand (207), presumably to bury the poacher's body Fragua sees hidden under bushes (224). This nightmare hypothesis, if my reading is correct, accounts for the time gap between the detached introduction and the novel's core. Dreams and nightmares follow their own non sequitur logic. If we accept that hypothesis, beyond Ogden's course from disappointed hope to despair, from frustration to dead end, *Assumption* reads like a nightmare founded on an unmentioned national nightmare. In that case my reading becomes an exercise based on Rancière's "la parole muette". The novel's ending is what Roland Barthes called an emotional moment of truth, a flash, a punctum, a poignant moment that hurts because it means beyond the represented object. Like Fragua, I no longer recognize the Ogden I first knew. The "likeness" the novel begins with is no longer just "difficult". It has become problematic. Many strands are involved in an uneasy feeling, among them the right for an individual to stand apart from the tribe by rejecting the ways it thinks and acts as well as the (d)evils it lives with. Ogden, nice enough to begin with, is denied this right and becomes a bolt of violence. To return to the quotation from "Alluvial Deposits" heading the essay, the opening part had "let my preconceptions get the better of me." The closing part makes me "[feel] small" for not having seen evil lurking around.

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## APPENDIX

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the real world." (204) Thirdly, names keep colliding: is Beetle's real name, Leslie Hempel (190), or William Yates as on the driver's licence Fragua finds? (221). The "desert wind" blows into a whirlwind when a nightmare's unconnected logic accumulates.

## From "Wash"

From *Assumption*Passages that have been deleted in *Assumption's* version

## Name changes

## Additions and/or syntactical changes

Dusk came on and the pinacate bugs were out of their holes, and trudging along the sand wash. Lucien Bradley pushed his toe into the path of one of the large beetles and watched it stand on its head. He glanced up at the shriek of a chat-little and noticed the pink in the sky. Although it didn't show promise of rain, he walked up to the rough ground near his truck to settle in for the night. He remembered how quickly desert floods could occur, how his father would not drive across a dip in the road if there was water standing in its trough. The chill of evening was already upon him, pushing his shoulders tight into his body and his palms flat together. He built a fire, ate a sandwich that he had bought some miles back outside of Las Cruces, and then rolled out his sleeping bag. He warmed his hands before the flame one last time and arranged sticks by the fire before slipping into his sleeping bag. Lying under the moon he noticed a saguaro cactus standing beyond the glow of his fire. He tried to recall the last time he had been able to sleep in the desert. The desert he and his father had shared was not like this one. The high desert was not as severe, not as frightening, constant, relentless. It was harsh only for its lack of water. His father spoke to him, a dead voice in the wind. He told Lucien what a fool he was, a fool to love the low land, a fool to have left school and joined the army, a fool to have no answers, and a fool to expect answers to questions he was foolish enough to ask. "I'm dead now, you fool," his father said, "and I've died to fucking spite you. Giving up life for what?" Lucien put a stick on the fire and said, "Fuck you, too." And then he felt stupid for talking aloud to his father. The dead made for decent memories, but lousy conversation. Fire was the substance of stuff, he thought, heat and consumption, light and vacuum, the center of power and the edge of approach and all the kinds of philosophical shit his father used to say about it. He was tempted to shove his hand into the flames.

His mother would be waiting in Taos for him and she wouldn't tell him to get fucked. She

Dusk came on and the pinacate bugs were out of their holes, and trudging along the sand wash. Ogden Walker pushed his toe into the path of one of the large beetles and watched it stand on its head. He glanced up at the shriek of a chat-little and noticed the pink in the sky. Although it showed no promise of rain, he walked up to the higher ground near his truck to settle in for the night. He remembered how quickly desert floods could occur, how his father would not drive across a dip in the road if there was even an inch of water standing in its trough. The chill of evening was already upon him,. He built a fire, ate a sandwich that he had bought some miles back outside of Las Cruces, and then rolled out his sleeping bag. He stared up at the new moon and the clouds that threatened to obscure it and tried to recall the last time he had been able to sleep in the desert. The desert he and his father had shared was not like this one. The high desert was not as severe, not as frightening, constant, relentless. It was harsh only for its lack of water. His father spoke to him, a dead voice telling Ogden that he was a fool, a fool to love the desert, a fool to have left school, a fool to have joined the army, a fool to have no answers, and a fool to expect answers to questions he was foolish enough to ask. And his father would have called him a fool for working as a deputy in that hick-full, redneck county.

His mother would be waiting for him in Plata She wouldn't call him a fool. He thought about the desert around him, thought about water and no water, the death that came with too much water, flooding that carried mice and snakes and nests and anything else in its way. To drown in a desert, that was the way to die, sinuses replete with sandy water,



would hug him like he was no fool, cry about his father's death, and smile over her son's homecoming. She would ask him to tell her about Honduras and then not listen. He laughed as he thought about the low desert surrounding him, thinking about water, no water. But when the water came it meant death. Mice and snakes and nests and anything else would be swept away by flooding, sudden rivers on a timeless landscape. To drown in a desert, that was the way to die, sinuses replete with sandy water, dead eye to dead eye with rattlers in the flow Lucien closed his eyes and thanked God or something, anything, that he was out of the army, lost, but out of the army, no smarter, but out of the army.

dead eye to dead eye with rattlers in the flow. Ogden closed his eyes and thanked the desert wind that it was all over.