

SEVEN WONDERS OF THE WORLD

Jacob Paul

Creation, . . . and on the third day, without mention of it as such, third days were created, and thus forever Tuesday, neither doleful as Monday, nor hopeful as humpday, devoid of Thursday's insolent debauchery and Friday's intentional dissipation, simply a day not close to the end of the workweek. Who remembers that on this day God created grasses and fruits and trees? Created dry land and called it the earth? And by virtue of that created the Seas? Of which there have always been seven, if never the same seven.

The Sea of Sanji for example, marked the end of the Arabian trade route, the seventh of the seas one must cross who wishes to go to China, and what wonders one might encounter en route: In the Sea of Fars, one fishes pearls. Lawri has islands with kings who do not owe each other allegiance, it can be sailed by the stars, contains huge fish, is filled with marvels beyond description! Harkand contains all of Sri Lanka, legendary for rubies and precious stones, rattan and cane. Kalah, which means beautiful in all Semitic languages, is as shallow as its sea serpents' enormity; the wary fear these serpents upon the wind lest they smash their ships. These but five seas of seven! Now they are bays and gulfs and straits. Only the Sea of Sanji is still a sea, the South China Sea, locus of American despair, arena of the Vietnam War. What has become of wonder, of travel, of serpents and rubies and huge fish? Without these one might despair, grow apathetic, become depressed.

One might be guilty of Acedia, once one of the seven deadly, since replaced by Sloth. No hope. Tuesday always. But. Nothing. But nothing. Thursday happy hour. Nothing. Dismiss that. Instead: dismiss the break in the weather, dismiss the breath entering and exiting one's lungs, dismiss the taste of hummus and peat and pollen and moisture and burning cedar, dismiss the emergence of rhythm and variation and return, dismiss the scent of organic multiplication, dismiss this view, dismiss the capacity to apprehend and assemble into meaning and relevance. One . . . no, you, you, you reject, you reject and your listlessness heralds a divinity of joy: you, its heretic.

Seven heavenly virtues to defend against seven deadly sins; for willful listlessness: Industria. Diligence. Really? Diligence? So penned Aurelius Clemens Prudentius: what more could one expect of a fifth-century monk with a name like that? As drab as ever a virtue might be, but then what virtues are vibrant? Chastity? Temperance? Patience? Perhaps Patience is desirable, but glamorous no. Humility, sure, meekly bearing False Modesty's saddle. Kindness, Humanitas, is a virtue one can get behind, graciously tending to Envy.

But to hell with prude Prudentius, wonder is the virtue to defeat Acedia, and what is more wondrous than a blank slate? Than a seventh continent with neither trees nor Olympic ring? With neither natives, nor sovereignty? Its terrain penguinated? Thirteen thousand feet beneath its frozen surface, Lake Vostok waits with what may be life that predates the life that led to ours, preserved for fifteen to twenty-five million years, a record of creation before creation, too fragile to breathe our air, or so we suppose. And yet the ice is melting, Antarctica shrinking, Vostok's secrets ever closer, a Russian drill bit hovering over a thin frozen spurt of the lake's nearly breached waters.

Is Detroit melting at the same pace? In 1961, *TIME* magazine talked of America's seventh-largest city's decline, of its champions. This last decade *TIME* did the same, but Detroit is now our eighteenth-largest city, best known for photos of its fabulous decay. Will it reveal in its expanding urban prairies the abandoned path of inorganic crystallization? Quartz grown to a different form, amethysts outside empiricism?

Or are all of these only as ephemeral as the seventh noble gas, the last of the seventh period of the periodic table, likely solid under normal conditions due to relativistic shift, unhappy offspring of lead and krypton, so unstable that only three, or maybe four, of its atoms have ever been detected, then only in the evidence of their decay, radioactive, transactinide, synthetic, proof that being the heaviest of heavyweights confers no immutability, no duration, Ununoctium. Eka-Radon. Element 118, the 114th in excess of Aristotle's four (none of the 118 are of Aristotle's four: earth wind air or fire). Understood only through theorization, unavailable for experimentation, Ununoctium is the opposite of wonder: it is not experiential;

it is neither ineffable nor ethereal; yet, it defies defining, demands the impossible be possible, allows that even a noble gas, noble for its inflexible formlessness, may be solid on condition of the fleetingest of existences. Though isn't even creation fleeting? A bang or a breath? An expulsion of timelessness, of vacuum, of void? Creation is differentiation. From this rendered this and that, light and dark, land and sea, night and day, Sunday and Monday and Tuesday. Each only once and always always.