

Percival Everett, PARTS OF BRAIN: Its Functions (n.p.: n.p., 2015).

\$?

In this, the latest of his prolific career, Percival Everett completes his trilogy--one initiated with the well-received I Am Not Sidney Poitier and continuing in a darker register with Percival Everett, by Virgil Russell. Those accustomed to the gentle and mock-witless prose of Everett's early works should quite frankly stand clear. Gone here are the amusing subversions of his many novels, novellae and stories, and gone too, as if in recompense, are the almost perfunctory rave reviews, appearing everywhere a fan, or perhaps a student, is granted access to the back neglected pages of a quarterly. The text, curiously, is unillustrated.

To readers who find the second in this series difficult, the third will prove simply inaccessible. "That of which readers cannot speak, they should not know." And we need not wonder thus at the curious silence with which this latest work has been received. Recall the embarrassed pause of Everett fans world-wide, trying to make sense of the second in this series, and falling back on earlier works. Virgil Russell ... ah yes, I've read ... in it. But Glyph! Now there! Recall Truman Capote's praise of JFK. The anecdote is well known and may well be true. For years, Capote reports, he grew tired of the ordinary sycophancy of "Ah yes. I've read In Cold Blood ... and the others." Yet JFK, by contrast, no reader himself, grasped Capote's hand in a show of friendship: "Of course! I've read ... uh, Breakfast at Tiffany's ... and the others." Although it is hard to imagine that Everett himself will ever have such casual readers as Capote enjoyed, or those who believe they should become known as such, I have no doubt that Everett-eers, fit though few as Flaubert notes, will one day say to him at a reading, book-launch party, or in the hallway of a Great University: Oh yes. Of course. I've read ... Erasure ... and [haltingly] Zulus and ...the others. But it will never, I think, be these.

I Am Not Sidney Poitier is Austin, pure and simple (Jane?? you're joking!). And from the single utterance of the title extends the narrative: a black writer (we need not waste time with Everett's repeated and tiresome claims that he himself is never in these works--Oh no! Not the brave and competent cowboy of Suder, the skilled horse trainer of Water Cure with his sardonic, deadpan wit!) a black writer, not Everett himself, whose

photo graces the flyleaf in his best H. Rapp Brown, struggles to write a novel, a novel, the novel, and most decidedly not and I repeat not "the black novel" such as penned by a graceless colleague. Yet he finds the genre to be inescapable. Poitier Not Poitier discovers he can avoid this vile thing only by placing it within quotation marks: he will not write the black novel, but write rather the cynical "writing of the black novel." But the parody, like Milton's serpent "that green eyed monster which doth mock," turns finally on itself, and readers, warned This is Not a Black Novel (that reflection of the title itself) will of course have none of this! A tale is a tale, no matter how preposterous. Give me that damn apple! Would Not Sidney be caught after robbing the 7-11? How did his appearance on Oprah go? You cannot, as Kincaid reminds us (De Narr. Ont. et Epis. fol., 3Av.12b), escape the vortex of narrative, no matter how it is subverted. It is quite simply, as Kincaid so eloquently reminds us, turtles. All the way down.

The second and far more challenging offering is Percival Everett ... hereafter PEbVR. It is difficult not to see this very acronym as suggestive, but reality is full of coincidence; there is always room for "one more." Here, the Foucauldian extended utterance of IaNSP is left behind. We return to Great America, with a dazzling, now suspect Western(!), it may seem, woven of narrative threads so twisted we can untangle neither the rawhide strips (that infectious register!) nor ourselves. At the precise moment when we see an end ... --100 pages to tie these strands up, we grandly think. Would there be a Grand Corral? a story of a Foundling? Would Pickwick ... the back cover continues its relentless advance. The very materiality of the book becomes us (in all senses, pace Donne), and we realize for the first time that the book we have been reading--that Western adventure--is not the book we have been reading at all, since there is no time in this for any of the things we expect and demand from the genre to come to fruition (or Bloom, as it might be said). The book is not the book. And West, of course, cannot be West. I am Not Sidney Poitier. Nor Paul. Nor Vergil himself, it seems.

The reviews came late. We quote only the first in our growing portfolio. In toto, our reviewer (anonymous!) declares:

One would be advised that, whatever this is, it was not written by the Percival Everett who wrote Erasure and I Am Not Sidney Poitier [sic, no punctuation!] If

this person shares the name, have sympathy, but not to the extent of buying this, probably computer generated, book.

"One would ..." Again, the ouroboric limpidity of syntax. The ironies--that there are books that are not computer generated? In this century? ("Century" indeed!) Or do you mean the last? (Again, above.) That there are no authors not named Percival Everett? That we should not "have sympathy" for those not "sharing the name" of Percival Everett?

[desunt multa]

Percival Everett, PARTS OF BRAIN: Its Functions (n.p.: n.p., 2015). \$ Free

Everett has perfected here the postmodern autotelicism informing his best known works. The eponymous "brain" consumes itself so absorbingly as to leave little for this reviewer to mention. Deeply indebted to the Argentine Jorge Luis Borges, especially his derivative "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*," *Brain* carries that magisterial work to its logical conclusion. Whereas Menard rewrites a book he has intentionally never read, so *Brain* writes a book that will never be written. In the heyday of the pomo mode, Ronald Sukenick published *Out*, which consumed its own ending in a brilliant literary inversion. Everett outs *Out* for its empty gesture. As Nietzsche wrote in one of his lost fragments, "Nihilism is back!"

...

Percival Everitt, Parts of the Brain: It's Functions. (2015).

In the arid wastelands of modern literature, Percival Everett, the least likely of all the least likeliest, has arrived with a sprinkling can and seeds. Yes! Who would have

suspected that this unheeding hack, worried only about profits and feeding his own shallow smart-assedness, would be the one to bring Christ back into (Ch)annels of (Ri)ghteous St(Stand-Up-For-It)?

His latest work, *Brain*, is anything but brainy, speaking straight to the heart of those whose belief has survived the assaults of science, learning, and intelligence generally. For this, we can only say, "Bless You, Mr. Everett." Your wondrously ironic title signals to those of us in the Pasture of the Lamb that you are with us. Jesus will love you---very likely. If he don't, then we will.

[finis]

"The First Lines of the Novel ..."

Since the publication of these reviews, we are fortunate in discovering what appears to be a new, or perhaps revised? version of the text, or at least a fragment. It is, quite simply, a game-changer:

Here are the first lines of the novel:

The problem with implication is all that it implies. It should be that fundamental predicate logic is enough in this world, but it is not. If always comes back to reference and meaning. Frege's puzzle---and all that it implies. -- P.

No sooner had this become public than doubts, not insubstantial one, were raised. Some concerned mere literal matters-- punctuation, diction, even spelling ("Frege" indeed!). Others are grammatical, or rather, responses to grammatical ambiguities or sheer incompetence: does "it" refer to puzzle? or collectively to "reference and meaning"? (It is all quite a jumble.) There are then errors that in the hands of a professional (such as Everett, or at least his editors, American and continental alike, surely are) would be simply unforgiveable or unimaginable: "If" for "it." (!) Questioned too are matters of style: the curious repetition "implication"/"implies"--these are novels, after all, or

introductions to them, not bad versions of Shakespearean sonnets. How to account for this? The underlying logic invoked or implied (again, that 'implication' !) has also come under scrutiny. "Should"? the deontic nature of the thing? (As if the sentence might be construed at all! for goodness sake.) Or the self-referential embedding of the statement itself: Not "the first lines" but rather "The first lines are as follows."

All rather reminiscent, one might unkindly say, of the prose and thinking of the "first reviewer" (so soundly critiqued), and not the "author" at all. He (the reviewer, that is, whose words are cited above, and by this, I mean far above) who would have us all apologize for not "sharing the name" of the illustrious author? We should feel, perhaps, guilty? Do we simply blame this on the conventions of mid-century America? The idea! Everett? Preposterous. But who can say.

To dismiss this is perhaps the easiest course, but a course not to be taken. "The first lines of the novel ..." are clearly not the first lines at all. They are, rather, responses to the true first lines, which are arguably here in this text: Percival Everett, The Brain ... or perhaps in that unnamed reviewer him/her/self/-ves. A forgery in turn? Another forgery? [add citations here ...]. External evidence, alas (too extensively to cite in our text [add footnotes here]), does not support such a lazy reading. The words are those with which Everett fans must learn to live.

Have you seen, by chance, the glass at Long Medford?

A marvel!

...

[NO TITLE]

With unusual insight, Everett has recognized the tautology of fictional language and hence its irrelevance. Following Nietzsche and Vaihinger, he acknowledges that fiction is impossible once reality has become fiction. Hence, the non-novel, anti-novel, perhaps

supra-novel, in which like Oakland there is no there there. Critical commentary only, fading Nabokov's pale fire to ashes. The reference to Frege is especially poignant.

Fragment:

Ah, yes, [sic] one recognizes the hand

Sent from my iPad.

(Recognizes the hand indeed! How diabolically abstruse!)

I think this is the proper place--tell me if I am wrong--to correct some serious misapprehensions. I have recently (only thirty minutes ago) heard from one "Joseph A. Dane" (or so he says) that he is tired of reading anything about Everett and that we might better employ our time on writers more likely to repay close attention. I hesitate to let him speak in his own words, but I am told (by my attorneys) that I should protect myself, advice which seems to me savvy yet somehow cowardly, as if I had something to fear from this "Joseph A. Dane" or anyone else (apart from those jealous of my own standing and set on to attack me by my very own mother, the unnatural hag).

In any case, here is the note from Joseph A. Dane, unaltered (except for some necessary spelling and grammatical corrections, along with those modifications in tone necessitated by the laws of civilized discourse:

Dear Kincaid,

As you know (much better than I) what we owe to Percival Everett. I speak here of "owing" not in the figurative sense, referring only to the extortion ring he operates and the "loans" he has forced on us. I think myself it is time we found ways to shuffle off this obligation and stop writing these unnatural "reviews" as if we were judicious admirers of his work, testifying to our delight. I know it must cause pain, even to you.

If you meet me under the clock (you know which one I mean) at the scheduled time, I will unveil to you a plan I have to rid us of the troublesome pest. I will not say the plan is wholly within the law or without some risk of being messy. But, as you once said, what good is every accomplished without some bloodshed. How true.

I have alerted the authorities, of course.

Prof. Kinkaid Emirates:

I have no idea what nefarious schemes you are talking about but I would thank you to keep our private correspondence, real and imagined, to yourself!

--Please agree to accept my sincerest claim to be your obedient servant [***]

[Attributed to P.E. Source unknown]

Typo of mine in the first lines. First word of the final sentence should be "It" and not "If."

Let's watch the rain.

P

Commentary

Another fragment, this one, I am sorry to say, having less claim to author(ity) (!) than the last. One questions, as many have reminded us, the very epistem-(ont- !!)ology suggested in such ex pro factum apologies (and how does ex take the accusative in this construction? more accurately "ex" should be construed as applying to the quoted phrase) as if Plato had recommended that one begin IN the middle of things, rather than advising that, like a panting lover, one rush TOWARD the middle things"--and who does not know what THAT is about? And who too, in these fallen times, deserves the flattery consequent on even understanding such subtleties? It is all, of course, a matter of real vs. imagined worlds, the essence of "The Fictional" being (participle, not noun!!!) lying, do you see? (pun intended!!! of course) in that very distinction: if, it. A world of promise, or more accurately and precisely, 'world' of such. Something this author, doubtless not the same "author" or 'author' implied by the work under review itself (for this distinction, see of course Saussure L'écriture, p. 17)

If dry tomorrow is not good at 8:10. P

NOT DRY! --P

(!!!)

The following image, somewhat mischievously entitled "Figure I" (!) and assumed to be genuine, belies what may rather generously be described as a careless error concerning the absence of illustrations in an early review. ("Absence ..." referring of course not to the text of the reviewer's Brain but rather to ... but the judicious reader will hardly require explanation!). The sensitive viewer should be warned (or perhaps will note) that "Brain" or its various "Parts" (!) are not the first matters this image may suggest.



Dear Prof. Kinkaid:

If it is all the same to you, would you please keep this note private and not, as is your wont, "tell the laity," as the Bard would have, by disseminating (the allusion will be more than clear below!) to your usual vulgar readership? But it has come to my attention, and how could it not? that there are those using the "Comment" function to overly-obfuscate

(and only you can tell me whether the hyphen is appropriate [! {if you get my drift}]) what is otherwise a straight-forward plot (... and I am sure the Wimsatt-ian reference to 'death of the author', fictional and real, need [subjunctive, perhaps?] no explication). In any event, I quote the offensive missive in its entirety, correcting only for egregious lapses in sense and grammar. Note too, the offensive Helvetica:

Parerga, Derrida noted, [Derrida indeed! correct ref. --ed.] give [READ: lends] body to the sculpture and the text. If there is no there there, then what happens to these edges, or the comments that surround the empty center? [No ONE there, of course] Diving deep into the pyramid, do we find the pharaoh's sarcophagus missing? [READ: "should one dive deep into the abyss , would one ..." of course] Was it ever there? Grave robbers, [VERY clever] or just kingly [kindly?] illusion?

Nota (from my lawyer [SOLICITOR]): The comments (supra [read: HERENCLOSED]) are written by a licensed (Ph.D. [read: P.H.D.]) scholar, who expects to be remunerated for any and all utterances connected with his "profession as professor." [DIABOLICALLY abstruse. The point seems to be that "professorship" is some kind of JOB or vocation [!]-something all evidence seems to deny] Royalties generated by BRAIN [Ha ha! again the acid wit--"Brain" for "brain"?] should be shared not only with its multiple (and execrable!) [strike as offense to good taste] authors but also with its commentators in proportion to the verifiable byte count. [I have no idea what au. intends.] Yes, spaces and punctuation are to be included in the calculations. [The very implication that "art" has a "price" or "value" is an amazonian {!! heh heh} conception quite foreign to you and I.] Please send account information to this address for regular direct deposits. The critic [How dare s/he????!!!] commenting above thanks you, as I do. Please note that my explanation is longer than his comment and hence more deserving of pay. If paying in person (not recommended), please be careful not to ding the doors of my white Maserati. Lawyer Block (yes, I did make a brief appearance as an infirm lawyer in Franz Kafka's THE TRIAL). [For the absurd "Block" "Bloch," of course. {unless referring to some preposterous locution as in "quote" ...}] ...

Capisce? as the poet saith. I suspect (wink!) you will know how to proceed.

I am ...

ORANGE GROVE: A REVERIE (Coda to Part I)

Orange Grove
810?
Pourquoi n'as tu pas dit
'orange'?
Mais oui!
Will be there at 8.
Shall we try if dry tomorrow?
730
Si
Click clickaclicka click clic.
Let's watch. But you're probably right.
It is dry
But I
Must drive

To the doctor.
Sleep
Thanks

[Hey I am in Phily visiting my brother]

A fair copy, with minimal editorial intervention. "Orange" (line 1) cleverly echoed in line 4 ('orange' [!]), an eye rhyme, as it were, the link to be sadly missed in oral performance. *Dit / oui*, although the Académie might protest, again the assonances: *be, we, Si*, perhaps *try, dry*. Note the alliteration, line 10. As for *[w]ill* and *[s]hall* [!] see Fowler, *Mod.Eng.Gramm.op.cit.*, less satisfactorily Strunk and Wagner, sec. 158(f).

To be fair (in the justicial sense) I am not entirely pleased with au's rather tasteless, not to say entirely un-racist, attempt at wit in speaking (haltingly!) in Click language. But one notes regardless the forced rhymes in the second stanza. The elusive allusion (!) to medicine. The insincerity of the closing thanks, or "thanks," more accurately 'thanks'. All very postmodern, as the poet saist.

Read against his earlier contribution, the perceptive reader can only conclude all to be an ill-disguised paranoid outburst protesting the completely innocent epistolary exchange, quoted earlier, "Death of the Author," (pace Kittredge!) a phrase to be construed as no more dangerously literal than the bulk of that notable's oeuvre. Yet Truth, like Beauty, as Shelley penneth, Fair Fallen Flower!, best in the mind's eye. Forgive the poet in me!

Meinen Freunden:

Nota: I am skeptical of the authenticity of the final line, or perhaps its depth is quite too sound for plummeting. Au. has, to my and perhaps to your as well, knowledge, no "brother in Philly"--a somewhat too crude phrase for a Great American City, [spp!]. Full stop after "Hey," but I am hardly the pedant to insist on type (meaning 'kind' of course!). Perhaps a lapse no medium can excuse, a principle confirmed by the Stagarite. Is it Camden, perhaps? The Mafioso dons and an equally racist shot (wrong word!) at a dated mythology? Extortion? Murder? The executions at midnight?

I await, with baited breath, your reply.

I am, yr hmplesrvte, ...

Everett, [Percival?] PARTS OF BRAIN: ITS FUNCTION

Part II: Eftsoons Irene

Of course there is no resolution of the paradox of postmodern authorship. That would involve a fundamental both interpretation and intentionality. While the death of established of a notion or practice of interpretation, it is the relegation of intentionality to the status of expectation meaning. Here all meaning comes to be out of authorial death, the condition of meaningful writing is that it understands authorial voice is meaningless. This is not to say that is oblique and never self directed or determined. There is a self reflexive approach in this conceptual inversion and that is to use language, the consequences of signification in the disappearance of voice. The form of disappearance has much in common with way Barthes defines mythology — as two semiological systems, one that is staggered in relation to the other. It is a linguistic system, the language building its own system, building itself, as it were, a meta language built self-consciously and at the service of the mythology and the mission of making the mythology itself. All of this is an act of contingency.

↳ So raising the question about the necessity of contingency. Must contingency exist as a foil to necessary truth(s)?

After the death of the author, the death of the reader, and an imperative toward zero degree ~~interpretative~~ interpretative forms, the idea of mortis, of playing dead might be proposed as something of a conceptual intervention.

This is what David thought — all of this, while he sat in the waiting room of the hospital, waiting, waiting to hear from the bald doctor whether ~~he~~ he still had a ~~dead~~ child. As it turned out, he had some

INTRODUCTION

The text is fragmentary, and as it stands, not unapproaching nonsense. The hand hesitant, the ductus severe. Obsolete forms abound. Difficile est, as Plato notes, even to be kind in such cases. Even the photographic evidence seems unreliable. Yellow paper? Yellow boots perhaps! But this?

There is moreover more (excuse the poet in me!) than a hint that the ms. or text is in fact not "Part of Brain" by Percival Everett at all but rather a bad draft of an even more execrable fiction of (meaning 'from') the past. I suspect Eating Lisa, or perhaps the one (or was it another one?) with the mule on the cover. Why Everett would repeat himself in this way, or attempt to pass this off as new, is quite beyond us. As dispassionate editors, it is not our role to judge. Nor to worry overmuch about such legal niceties as copyright law.

We provide here a "reading text," suitable for student use; a more complete scholarly edition, with full apparatus, is in preparation. Eccentric spellings have been normalized, the many infelicities and indelicacies of expression silently corrected. Overall, editing is light and sternly conservative, following principles, of course, enunciated by McKerrow, in his "Copy Text" (suppl. McKann, Theory). Corrections of substance are noted in brackets.

--edd.

THE TEXT

Eftsoons Irene comes to the realization that the parrots of postmodernism¹ have added up at last! TLON!² World, involves the four-demented repositioning, re-CON-figuring of the nocturnal word-smithering³ of both interpretation and intention. Death of authority? Authenticity itself therefore? The burglar rations the bourgeois establishment of its relations,⁴ of its practices of interpretation. The interprevility⁵ to expectorate status. The monic⁶ declares the potential of touching meaning.

Here the meaning!

Here the authorial death!

The condition of meaning

Ful writing understates itself

As voiceless.

This is not to say that authorial voice is meaning.⁷

It is the case⁸ that meaning is oblique⁹ and

Never self.

Directed or determined.

There is a self.¹⁰

¹ Cf. Williams, "Comedian" "A new reality in parrot-squawks" apparently.

² The Garcia Marquez reference is perhaps basic.

³ Possibly "-ines" i.e., "smithering" (!) more in keeping with the often affected sermonis humilis of our author.

⁴ Nicely turned! Note internal assonance.

⁵ Portmanteau, with 'civility'.

⁶ Ref. to DesCartes' theory of the monad.

⁷ Obviously ironic, in that it most clearly is to say precisely that!

⁸ Wittgenstein, apparently, Prin. Mathematica, sec. 1.

⁹ Clearly a reference to a contemporary writer and colleague of Everett who uses this word with annoying frequency.

¹⁰ Stunning affirmation! Cf. n. 6 super.

Reflexive approach in this concept, dual inversion.¹¹

And that is to use language.

The consequences of signification are¹² the disappearance of voice.

The form of disappearance has much in common with why.¹³

Barthes defines Mythology as two semiological systems. One¹⁴ is staggered.

In relation to The Other, it is a linguistic system.

The language building its own system.

Building itself, as it were

A metalanguage-built Self.

Consciously and at the service of the mythology
and the inversion of making, ...

The Mythology Itself!!

All of this is an act of contingency.

So! Raising the question about the necessity of contingency: MUST contingency
exist?¹⁵ Yes! A foil to necessary truth.

After the death of the author.

The death of the reader.

An imperative toward zero.

Degré¹⁶ interrupts forms.

The idea of just Mort.¹⁷

Of playing [The] Dead.

¹¹ Meaning obscure. Our desperate reconstruction at least salvages a modicum of sense.
MS: r. a. in this conceptual inversion (!)

¹² MS "in" unconstructable.

¹³ Possibly "WAY"? Anagram? "Who asks you?"

¹⁴ I.e., you, or I. Or any reader.

¹⁵ Brahms: muss es sein? Es muss sein! apparently

¹⁶ The villain in Perils of Pauline.

¹⁷ Ref. obscure.

Might May be proposed as something of a conceptual intervention?¹⁸

This is what David thought.

All of this.

While he sat

In the waiting room of the¹⁹

Hospital,

Waiting

Waiting

[waiting
waiting]²⁰

to heard from the bald doctor²¹

has he still had

a his child.

As it turned out:

HE HAD SOME!²²

¹⁸ Possibly: "Might (power) may itself be proposed ..."

¹⁹ Note enjambment.

²⁰ Obvious omissions due to scribal haplography.

²¹ Ref. Beckett, the Bald Alto.

²² Suggestive, and perhaps somewhat indelicate. We retain the expression, whose coarseness may find excuse in later chapters.

(multa desunt)