

Dancing with the stars Albert, J.G.

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Dancing with the Stars

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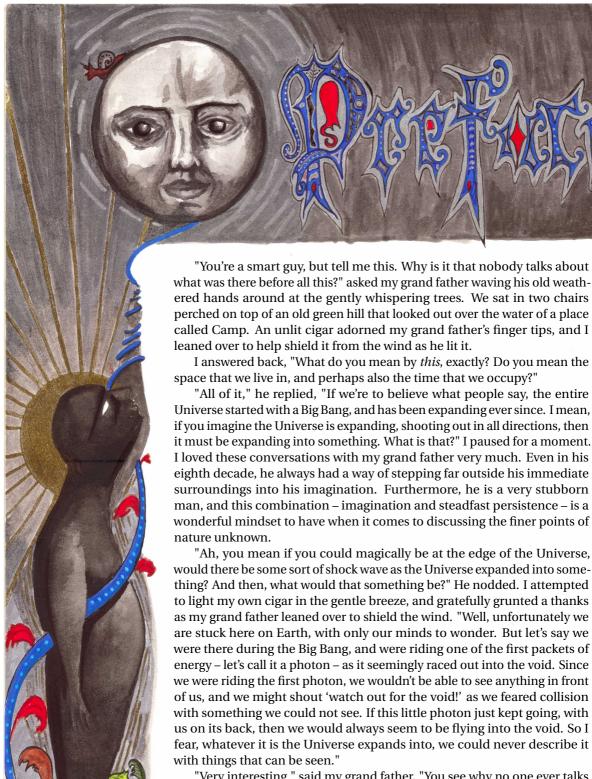
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For Alina, my twinkling star.

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"Very interesting." said my grand father, "You see why no one ever talks about this, because no one knows, but you have a good way of putting it into words. Surely there must be something we could measure of this void,

like a temperature perhaps?"

"You know what temperature is, right? It's just a measure of how fast molecules are bouncing around. If there is no matter – or energy – in the void, then it's not possible to measure temperature." I smiled at my grand father's face.

"Ah, your right. Maybe one day we'll know, and I think you're the right guy for it." The next few minutes passed without words between us, although it was by no means silent. Around us whispered the leaves, and below us the roll of the waves against the shore concealed their meanings. As it were, we'd return to this topic again some time later.

These are the sort of memories, going back as far as I can recall, that I cherish. Not only of conversations with my grand father, but with others, and myself.

It is through the childhood that a person first gains their sight of the world – that magical thing we call life. We naturally accept the guidance of those around us, who walk with us through the difficulties ahead. It seems such a messy and beautiful dance, and all lifeforms partake. Interestingly, we messy creatures have devised scientific inquiry as a tool for surveying that which lays before us. To us, we look not into a void, but into a rich landscape. And yet, we too emerge from a singularity at birth and dance forth into the unknown, so some prudence to caution is advisable.

Can we use our senses and reasoning, that which we investigate the world with, to investigate existence itself? I would argue the only such hope we have of understanding existence through reasoning is that it's a tautology, 'cogito ergo sum' in the words of René Descartes. However, outside the walls of the mind we quickly lose objectivity, if it ever existed, and is properly put by Meister Eckhart von Hochheim (ca. 1260 – 1328),

If reason presents certain actions as likely to improve your condition but your conscience does not approve, then leave them undone. Reason never grasps the world in its entirety and the means it dictates to achieving its limited aim will ultimately, and in some inscrutable way, only cause damage.

If in this life we always had a mirror in front of us in which we could see things at a glance, grasp everything in one image, acting and knowing would not cause us any problem. But, since in our viewing we must turn from one thing to another we cannot concentrate on one without obstructing the other.

In a sense, Meister Eckhart paints a type of uncertainty principle between reason and conscience, acting and knowing, epistemology and ontology. To turn toward one you must turn from the other. We may juxtapose the bumbling child's discovery of life with the ideal scientist, into whom the child yearns to become. Regarding the end state of this transformation, science may be seen as immaculate and homogeneous, and is often given titles of truth. Yet, look closer and the messy dance of the child never truly stops, like Zeno's tortoise never quite reaching the finish line. There is never time to pause and look around and feel certainty, 'a masterpiece is never finished, only abandoned' in the words of Leonardo da Vinci. Thus, I must insist, science *is* an interpretive dance, where no one may violate Meister Eckhart's uncertainty principle.

Why are we dancing with the stars? Well, I'm afraid *the medium is the message*, and that's all there is to it. Twentieth century philosopher, Michael Serres, metaphysically discusses two rats eating rich left overs on a Persian rug in the Mayor's house,

The two companions scurry off when they hear a noise at the door. It was only a noise, but it was also a message, a bit of information producing panic: an interruption, a corruption, a rupture of information. Was the noise really a message? Wasn't it, rather, static, a parasite? A parasite who has the last word, who produces disorder and who generates a different order. Let's go to the country where we eat only soup, but quietly and without interruption.

To parasite means to eat next to. The noise partakes in the meal next to the rats and causes panic. In the country quietness is the parasite.

We astronomers look up at night on a clear sky and watch the stars twinkle and consider the twinkle a noise, a corruption, a rupture of information. Is the twinkle really a message? The twinkle is a movement of light, spurred by Earth's atmosphere, as natural a thing as ever existed. We isolate the movement, and, following it, we dance our telescopes until we see a stationary shape. Oh, but such as strange shape! The struts of the telescope leave these arms of light seemingly coming out of the star, another corruption. Are these arms of light really a message? To be sure they are not, but merely a parasite. And, we may go on and on in such a way always trying to interpret what is beyond the noise without knowing. And, that is the essence of this work: we perform an interpretive dance with twinkling lights, with an impeccably powerful tool of human inquiry, trying not to confuse the message for the medium.

