

The Metaphysics of Cake

by John Olson

I think of cake as a mutation of bread. Why do I do that? Why not see something simply as it is and leave it at that? I have no answer. If you look closely at anything you will begin to see it differently. I guess that would be my answer. Nothing is simple if you look at it long enough. We all like to believe in worlds that we cannot see. Now dip those oars in the water and make your boat move. Here we begin to enter the cave. The cave is deep and scintillates with strange crystals. We are in the Palace of the Lobster King. How did we get here? I invented a boat and a pair of oars and here we are. Floating on water. What color is the water? Let's say the water is black. Let's say language alters perception. Let's say illusionism has nothing and everything to do with space. When I plug something into the wall I expect there will be sufficient energy available to make that object do what that object has been intended to do. If it's a radio, I want to hear sounds coming out of it. Voices, electric guitars, discussions, descriptions, conversations, opinions, confessions, fugues, waffles, forest fires, drama. And if it's an electric egg beater I want to see those blades spinning in a uniform bombinating blur. It gets me awake. I feel agitated now. Just thinking about these things makes me feel agitated. And whenever I smell creosote I think of Neil Cassady walking the rails in Mexico. I think of Kerouac and cheap wine and creaking beds and lonely San Francisco nights. I think of Proust and panthers in the skin of men. A thyroid simmering in indeterminate despair. There is a spark of infinite jest in this amble. My nose has been giving me trouble all week and this is the result. Those antihistamines will really do it to you. But watch it or the membrane will get too dry and you'll end up with a nosebleed. And remember what old T.S. Eliot said about nosebleeds disturbing the universe. It's like walking on an unfamiliar lawn that has been watered far too much and before you know it you're sinking in it and getting your shoes wet and leaving big muddy footprints and messing up the grass. Can we ever truly

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know reality? I don't think so. But fly in comfort my friend. Lean back and enjoy the thrust of those engines. And when your plane leaves the ground and you wonder how such things are possible, remember, you're living with a person in your body called a self. Be kind to that self. Give it lots of liquid. Cover your mouth when you cough. And don't worry too much about the person sitting next to you. It's just me. And I'm dealing with roughly the same measure of problems. Mysterious buttons on the seat rest. What to do and where to go when the plane lands. And this is why. This is why I think of cake as a mutation of bread. And swans as signs. And ideas of heaven rather awkwardly entertained at 30,000 feet above the earth.

