

# The Spectral University



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TOM WHALEN

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BOOKS BY TOM WHALEN

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*Winter Coat*

# The Spectral University

A Memoir of the Late Sixties

TOM WHALEN

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The cover photo of Old Main on the campus of the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, was taken in 1967 by the author.

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# The Spectral University

A Memoir of the Late Sixties

You arrive on an autumn afternoon, alone, no parents around to snuffle you here or there, no brother to abide, only the autumnal air crackling around you and other students adrift and wondering why exactly they are here, what it is that makes these next years essential to them, why they couldn't just stay home where their friends are, where the parents who nurtured them are, though you've longed to escape the daily routines of high school, the daily routine of work at your father's Esso station, the tang of battery acid when your fingers touch your tongue, the black embedded in the whorls; longed as well to escape that comic nightmare played out by you and your parents, where love and habit, indifference and hate twine about one another so tightly only a knife could unbraided them—to leave all this behind, all the mistakes and embarrassments of adolescence, the missed moments, missed shots and kisses, all your

childish fears and cruelties—to come here, then, to the University, the old campus sprawled across hills in the shadow of the Boston Mountains, a new beginning, yes, though even this young you know your past clanks inside you like pots in a tinker's sack, know, too, that already it has shaped you, though not definitively, and that you cherish, sometimes too lovingly, its sores and sorrows and solitudes.

To be away, separate, distinct, to distinguish yourself in your separateness—this, in part, is why you have come. Others, perhaps, have other reasons—that is not your concern. There is, yes, a war on, and surely some of the students are here to avoid being sent to Vietnam, but 1968 is still two years away, Kent State and the bombing of Cambodia four. You have been told at the Orientation to look around you, to gaze for a moment at your fellow freshmen—"Look closely," the man at the front of the auditorium says (is he a Dean? the Dean of Men? but what exactly is a Dean?), "look closely, because sixty percent of your classmates won't be here when the second semester rolls around."

For a moment, sitting with your required copy of C.P. Snow's *Two Cultures* in hand, you wonder if you will be among the missing, but only for a moment. Already you are comfortable here, despite the abundance of red hogs with saw teeth down their spines (the school's emblem), despite the predominance of peers who have no interest in learning, despite the (to you) deadly prose of Mr. Snow—you are alone, pre-registered,

dorm life will be no stranger than life at home, and it will only last a year before you move into an apartment, before you fall into sex or love, into the arms of another.

What early disappointments await you! You are a reader, have always been, thanks to your mother who read you to sleep at night and in the afternoon with *Uncle Remus: His Songs and Sayings*, *Treasure Island*, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, and while still in high school something (the wish to be alone? to learn?) led you on an off-season morning (a solitary autumn between the seasons of baseball and basketball) to Parker's Newstand where you selected from amongst hundreds of possibilities, from amongst hundreds of solicitous and salacious covers, a paperback like, say, *Pigeon Feathers* whose young tousle-haired author you had seen photographs of in magazines, or the anthology *The Existential Imagination* wherein you encounter for the first time the likes of the Marquis de Sade, Malraux, Musil, Pavese, and Aichinger. Was it a sixth sense that led you to read these books at sixteen, seventeen? Their covers were quieter, suggesting (unlike the genre books you passed over) there was more to them than met the eye—little knowing that the same could be said of the others, little knowing you were letting slip by the novels of Philip K. Dick, of David Goodis, of Jim Thompson.

You are, yes, a reader, or, better, a reader in training, unlike most of your classmen, and because you are a reader in training

you decide your first journey will be to the library. So you saunter forth, map in hand, across this hilly campus, squirrels scampering around the oak trees, busy in their season as you will soon be in yours. You know you will spend hours in the library, for months you have known this will be your refuge, and you have imagined that a University library, like the service station where sometimes you pulled the night shift, will be open twenty-four hours a day. For this first encounter you have nothing more in mind than to let your eyes lead you from shelf to shelf, book to book, but you'll start with the Dewey Decimal 800's. The squirrels cock their heads when you approach, then, used to such foolish figures, go on with their digging for acorns. You kick the leaves into the wind and follow them down the cedar-lined walkway that leads, at last, to your destination.

Then to walk up the steps and enter the cavernous space, larger than you imagined. The hushed voices. The scraping of chairs. The light gleaming off the shiny wood of the Card Catalogue files. And behind the check-out desk several young women already assigned their work-study detail, and behind them shelves stretching into darkness, and a spiral metal staircase leading up and down to the stacks. But how do you get to them? You see no means of entry to the books, so you go up to one of the young women, a student like you, but officious and official, and ask how one gets to the books here. You can't, she says. Fill out one of these. And she slides a form your way. But why not? you ask. And the young woman pauses from her

stamping of books and gazes over her glasses taking in for a moment you and your naive grin, then turns back to her work and says clearly, unambiguously, Closed stacks. Closed stacks. Undergraduates not allowed beyond this point. Embarrassed, you flip over a few cards in the Card Catalogue, slide quietly the little drawer shut, and walk out, hoping the young woman does not notice your retreat.

And there will be other disappointments: you test out of math, but not English, and must spend a semester parsing sentences, distinguishing phrases from clauses, clauses from themselves, a not unpleasant activity; you like the puzzle of grammar as much as that of math, but the other students, the "honor" students—they're reading novels in their class. And Biology 101 has over a hundred students, you scribble your notes as fast as you can, but little Dr. S. is not, alas, an engaging lecturer, nor can he sufficiently subdue the rowdies. (But you will learn from him, you will learn from them all, the good and the bad.) And, the deepest, most painful shame for a young would-be writer who expects his readers to be as blind as he: one day a professor will offer you your first bitter taste of salutary criticism; he will pull you aside, sit you down, lean over you and ask, regarding the manuscript in his hand, You write this? You manage a nod, and he says, This . . . this is shit.

The University. You are processed, carded, lectured, remembered, forgotten. The required courses must be done. In

an anthropology class you embarrass yourself and anger your fellow students and the professor when you suggest that hunters are out there not necessarily for the sport or a communion with nature or nourishment, but that indeed they may enjoy killing, and you wonder aloud if this might not be one reason some of your peers are in Vietnam. In your American short story class you praise William H. Gass's new story "In the Heart of the Heart of the Country," but the professor is annoyed—not by the story's structure but by its "obscenities." You sign up to be on the staff of the student literary magazine and learn that the year before the state legislature had banned the publication because it printed a poem by a Classics student entitled "An Egyptian Painting": "Now and then/ ocher Egyptians goose/ a red-assed monkey."

You work for Food and Dormitory Services as the vegetable man, dishing up vegetables to the students at dinner and afterwards cleaning the tables. Work must be done. The best and brightest are neither clean nor quiet. Food fights. A football player demands you get a fork for him, he confronts you. In your hand you hold a tray of slop wiped off the tables. Can you do it? You're afraid, yes, trembling with rage and fear, but you see out of the corner of your eye that the manager is watching; he'll be there to protect you. So you politely tell the large lad to go fuck himself, and when he pushes you, you dump your tray onto his chest. Yes, you are something of a coward and a rascal. You know it. You will always be a rascal. Your past clings

to you as faithful as a shadow.

All the chaos of this structured university life comes clearer the longer you are here; the longer you are here the more, it seems, the chaos. Football games, football weekends. The longhorns versus the razorbacks. In 1969 President Nixon helicopters in for the game, Secret Service peer over the tops of the buildings. You watch six students overturn a car with a Texas license plate. Across the way your neighbors confront one another with guns.

The University. Something is going on here, yes, but what is it? The school's first black law student is shot in the leg while jogging to class. You observe fraternity lads pissing on a young woman as she walks past. So you visit the Dean of Men, file a complaint. He's polite, then says, See those, pointing to a stack of paper a yard high on his floor. Those are complaints against the fraternities. Then why isn't something done about them? you ask. The Dean does not mean to deceive you; he simply says, Why do you think?

"Notice in *Huck Finn*," the professor says, "the river/land dichotomy—the lyricism on the river, the deceit and cruelty on land"—and, for the first time, you do. You see it even in the language of a single sentence: "and you see the mist curl up off of the water, and the east reddens up, and the river, and you make out a log cabin in the edge of the woods, away on the

bank on t'other side of the river, *being a wood-yard, likely, and piled by them cheats so you can throw a dog through it anywheres*; then the nice breeze springs up, and comes fanning you from over there, so cool and fresh and sweet to smell on account of the woods and the flowers; *but sometimes not that way, because they've left dead fish laying around, gars and such, and they do get pretty rank*; and next you've got the full day, and everything smiling in the sun, and the song-birds just going it!" (Italics added.) On your *Huck Finn* test you are able to use this dichotomy to help justify Twain's so-called problematic ending.

You read "The Ball Poem" by John Berryman, you read Wilbur's "Epistemology." One day, for your British Lit Survey course, you read Discourse V of Cardinal Newman's *The Idea of a University* and are delighted with his aesthetic view of knowledge as "something which grasps what it perceives through the senses." You read a little Berkeley, Borges, Durrell's *The Alexandria Quartet*, Nabokov's *Lolita*. For Christmas of your freshman year, your brother, bless him, gives you your vade mecum, Barth's *Giles Goat-boy*.

Is the drill field any place for a young man to develop, as Newman had it, a philosophic habit of mind? Here you stand with your fellow Air Force ROTC cadets, your hair trimmed above your ears by your roommate, your black shoes shined,

the buttons on your blue-gray uniform neatly aligned. At this time, all young men are required to be in the Reserve Officer Training Corps for two years. What is it they want you to learn? Discipline. How to march in a straight line and in time. How to listen. How to take orders. How to serve within a group. But a logging truck shifts gears up the mountain road in the distance, and above you the clouds refuse to stay aligned, refuse to remain only clouds. The wind brings the scent of hay and manure from the pasture across the road. You'd rather let, as you march up and down this field—one two one two—your thoughts drift, would rather, in fact, not march at all but stroll, an early morning stroll, no need to keep in step, though your fellow cadets look at you askance, you just smile and saunter along, hey, it's a lovely morning, the uniform's a little tight, but no matter, the grass is crisp under your tread, the young lieutenant is not at all pleased with what he sees, but for the moment he ignores you, he's destined for Vietnam in a couple of years if he's unlucky, but at least you're not walking off the field, even though you're not keeping in step, and there's so much to see on even this circumscribed stroll the time passes quickly enough, until the troops are called to attention and dismissed, all except, of course, you—and the young lieutenant stands before you.

Do you know how to march? he asks. Yes, you say, you were in the marching band for three years in high school. Do you, perchance, have coordination problems? No, you've played basketball and baseball for years. What position for the

latter, he wonders. Left field, first base, pitcher. Once, you brag, you pitched a one-hit shutout and struck out fifteen. Then why, he asks, can't you march in time? You rock back and forth on your heels, your gaze aimed over his left shoulder at the grazing dairy cows. You don't know, you say, your mind is just not on it. The lieutenant, all in all, means you no harm. He lets you go.

Next semester, quietly, inconspicuously, you drop out of ROTC, simply by not signing up for the course and forging your advisor's signature.

In the Fine Arts building they're running a foreign film series; you see there *The Seventh Seal*, *Shoot the Piano Player*, *Alphaville*, *Yojimbo*. You are as enthralled as you were as a child watching fifth-run, fifteenth-run showings of Val Lewton's classics *The Cat People*, *The Leopard Man*, *I Walked with a Zombie* at the Maco in Magnolia, Arkansas—no, more enthralled, for, though you are not a very sophisticated reader of films, the ghosts on the screen move you in ways as a child you were never moved. There are, thank god, no film courses offered yet at the University, no course in film theory, no credits allotted for mutilating Hitchcock, for mangling Godard—only these films you attend weekly, alone, amazed at what this spectral world offers. A travelling camera enters a darkened tunnel and just before it is about to leave the tunnel it jump cuts to within the tunnel again and just before it is to leave this time it

jump cuts back to the tunnel, and again this repeats and repeats again, until on the fourth attempt to exit the tunnel it cuts to the cold, bleak outskirts of a city. A mother (off-screen) says, as the face of her daughter fades to black, "You forget you're you, you're your husband's wife." A young woman leans her bicycle against a tree in a forest and a small boy bends in slow motion (double printing) to kiss the seat.

How intertwined are the epistemologies of loss and gain. Behind your own desperate eyes, you are learning this well.

You read *Invisible Man*. You reread it. You read it again. Your old buddy Brer Rabbit haunts its pages. "Boy, who was Brer Rabbit?" A con artist, a dupe, a black revolutionary—more than you or anyone knows. The author visits the campus, reads from his novel-in-progress a scene between his narrator and a lawn jockey, who is as loquacious as the Tarbaby is taciturn. When you shake the author's hand, you, too, are speechless.

The University. You process, record, remember, connect. A young man in the employ of Army Intelligence recruits a freshman, teaches him to hate his country, hate the war, teaches him how to make a bomb, shows him where to place it (in the greenhouse near the University's oldest building known as Old Main where your English and creative writing classes are held), leads him there, and then arrests him. You support Senator

Eugene J. McCarthy in his bid for the presidency because, in part, when asked why he desires the office, he says he does not "desire" it. Baffled, the reporter asks him what he really wants to be, and McCarthy says, First baseman for the New York Yankees. Robert Kennedy is assassinated. Martin Luther King is shot on the balcony of a motel. On television you watch Senator J. William Fulbright, the chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee and former president of the University, resist Defense Secretary Laird's star-spangled euphemisms, his pacification bombs, his neutralization of dissent. You stay up nights smoking hash, listen to the piano music of Satie, of Cecil Taylor, read *Ulysses*, *Moby-Dick*, Newman's *The Idea of a University* in its entirety, Conrad's *Victory*.

On your *Moby-Dick* test you are asked to discuss in detail Melville's classification of the whales in the "Cetology" chapter. "The classification of the constituents of a chaos, nothing less is here essayed." Book I. The Folio Whale. Chapter 1. The Sperm Whale. 2. The Right Whale. 3. The Fin Back Whale. 4. The Hump-backed Whale. 5. The Razor Back Whale. 6. The Sulphur Bottom Whale. Book II. The Octavo Whale. Chapter 1. The Grampus. 2. The Black Fish. 3. The Narwhale, whose "one-sided horn . . . would certainly be very convenient to him for a folder in reading pamphlets." 4. The Thrasher. 5. The Killer. Book III. The Duodecimo Whale. Chapter 1. The Huzza Porpoise. 2. The Algerine Porpoise. 3.

The Mealy-mouthed Porpoise. "But I have swam through libraries and sailed through oceans . . ."

"The only true enlargement of mind," Newman said, "is the power of viewing many things at once as one whole, of referring them severally to their true place in the universal system . . .," but you doubt if the good Cardinal, whose lectures on the University were delivered one year after Melville's novel appeared, would have taken to Ahab's "I am madness maddened!"

Something is going on here, but what is it? You stand on the top step at the back of Old Main looking down at the developing incident. Several students and professors have lain down in the middle of the street that passes through campus. Their objective is to protest the war by stopping the flow of traffic, which for the moment they have. You yourself would like to cross the street, but it is not essential that you do so. You stand here looking down on the protestors and the gathering crowd, some who support them, others who don't. Perhaps you've a class to get to, but if so, it must not be an important one, for you are in no hurry, or perhaps you are on your way to the new library with its open stacks. Why, you wonder, isn't campus security here? And why, if you are against the war, aren't you down there with them? Then, over the shouts, you hear the sound of motorcycles—not campus security, no, but three young men on bikes who of a sudden slice through the crowd toward the six lying on the street who, intelligently as far as you're con-

cerned, scamper out of the way. The crowd disperses. Today's protest is over. You walk down the steps and cross the street.

In Walt Kelly's comic strip *Pogo* a disgruntled Bun Rab is remonstrating again. The sign he carries reads, "Every day a holiday! Every day a holiday!" Your sympathies go with the rabbit; still, work must be done. You've two papers to write, one for Moral Issues, the other for Existentialism. For the latter, you will write a comparative analysis of Sartre and Ti-Grace Atkinson, a radical feminist whose work you know only through underground publications, concerning their notions on the relationship to the Other. But philosophy, you find, never goes as far as literature does; Sartre and Atkinson never take you to the end point of, say, a Larkin or Beckett. In Husserl's transcendental phenomenological reduction, for example, you wonder why the bracketer himself should not be bracketed.

On the third floor of Old Main you see a lavender balloon floating down the hall at about the same height of the heads of the passing students and professors, but none of them are paying it any mind. You lean against the wall and observe the balloon in its passage. You haven't attended your classes in days. Light streams through the tall windows at the end of the hall. What is a balloon doing here? Why doesn't anyone notice it? What's wrong here? Your second semester British Survey professor approaches. He is a bald-headed man, a Twain expert, and has

stated that he has no business teaching British literature. You missed the test last week on the Victorians, he says, Newman, Carlyle, Arnold, Ruskin. Yes, you say, but look at the balloon, you say, do you see the balloon, you say, what's a balloon doing here, isn't it amazing, you say. For a moment the professor turns his head to the floating object, but quickly turns back. Come see me this week, he says, and we'll do something about that test.

The suicides. Every year there are the suicides. A freshman waits for Parents' Day and leaps from the 12th floor of his dorm to the sidewalk up which his parents are walking to meet him. An acquaintance, a physics major, ties one end of a rope around a concrete block and the other around his neck, balances the concrete block on the headboard of his bed, lies down, then pushes the block off the headboard behind him. His roommate comes into town three days later and finds him still hanging there. A young poet impales himself on a sword, survives, then a month later shoots himself three times in the chest with a rifle. A young woman, a friend of your girl friend, is drugged and raped by the president of the Young Republicans for Freedom, but no one will listen, the police will not press charges, and one night after you and Jane have seen her home, she, too, kills herself. Another acquaintance (you spent an evening of your freshman year talking with him about Jansenism) slits his wrist because, his note suggests, he couldn't contain his

curiosity about whether or not something was waiting for him on the other side. "Suicide is painless," the song from the movie says. "Whoopee, we're all gonna die," another song says. You read the novels of the so-called black humorists. For Existentialism class, you use the case of someone deciding not to kill himself to exemplify a Kierkegaardian truth.

This afternoon it's your story the students, all over twenty-three, are discussing in class. Though you've taken this beating several times before, you still reel from the criticism. You are only twenty, what value could your work have, after all, to these graduate students? You're an interloper; at best, they're condescending, at worst, like now, they are brutal. You listen to their complaints—the story should start where it ends; why doesn't the character just rap his wife one across the mouth—jot down a note or two, you don't know what else you can do for your story at the moment; again you've exposed your writing to the eyes of others, and again you suffer and hope. Once the lambasting begins, they're all willing to jump in. But today, when they've had their say, a tension remains, the professor hasn't said anything yet. He looks over the class, lifts the manuscript off his desk, and waving it in front of him says, "You know how I can tell when I'm in the presence of a good story? When, at the story's end, my body starts tingling from the base of my spine to the back of my neck. And that's how this story makes me feel."

...

You are in your last semester at the University. Name the courses you took the first seven semesters. Aerospace Studies: Captain B. once said he, along with any one of us as his crew, could fly undetected a small plane up through Mexico and drop a nuclear warhead on any city in the continental United States. English Composition. Elementary French, two semesters: one jug-eared professor was Polish, you liked him, he drilled the class well; the other didn't care for your attitude. General Biology, two semesters. Basic Fine Arts Lecture, two semesters: an architect from Ireland showed slides of a football game and talked of the "beauty" of bodies in motion. Fine Arts lab: you make a C in art, the instructor didn't approve of the squiggles you meant to be waves. Principles of Effective Speech: you reviewed a play by Pirandello. Intro to Physical Science. Imaginative Writing: bless your creative writing teacher for his efforts and the books he assigned you in the Present Day Writers course and Form and Theory of the Novel. Intermediate French, two semesters. Intro to Literature. Intro to Philosophy. General Psychology. World Literature. English Literature to 1700. English Literature to the Present Day. Essay Writing: you read and reread Pound's *ABC of Reading*. American Novel: when you're supposed to be reading Wilder you devour instead Frederick Exley's *A Fan's Notes*. Introduction to Cultural Anthropology. Western Civilization, two semesters: the first semester professor also teaches logic and he is a very unpleasant man, he likes to berate the students in class;

the second semester prof flew missions in World War II and teaches your class *Catch-22* as a novel of the strictest realism. Critical Analysis of Literature: you study traditional approaches (textual-linguistic, historical-biographical, moral-philosophical), the formalistic approach, the psychological, mythological and archetypal approaches, the exponential approach. American Literature Survey. Philosophy of Religion: you learn the arguments for the existence of God, the principles of six major world religions, study Tillich's analysis of faith.

What courses do you choose for your last semester at the University? Moral Issues. Philosophy Honors Colloquium. Descriptive Astronomy. Existentialism. Contemporary Poetry. Creative Writing.

From where do you now derive your income? For the past two years you have been reading to a blind man all the course material for an M.A. in Counselling Psychology, as well as being the amanuensis for his tests and research projects.

What will happen this spring in the war? We will bomb Cambodia.

In the States? The killings of four students at Kent State University by the National Guard.

In your life? You will be put on a bus to Little Rock that will take you to your Army physical.

On Tuesday evenings you sit in the lecture hall of the Science building and take a quiz on the two chapters from your

textbook, *Exploration of the Universe*. You have read them before class and also last week after class. The Problem of More Than Two Bodies. Aspects and Motions of the Moon. Electromagnetic Radiation and How It Reacts with Matter. Triangulation of Space. The Light Emitted by and Received from Stars. The Stellar Population. Unusual Stars. The Interstellar Medium. Star Clusters. Stellar Evolution. You love the language of astronomy, the poetry of it. Cepheid variables, shadow cones, cloud chambers, limb darkening of the sun.

After the quiz your class removes to the Greek amphitheater for observation time. You wait your turn at the telescope, the night sky above you, the snow-draped earth all around. For the moment, nothing is on your mind other than this night and what you are about to see; perhaps it will be the rings of Saturn or Jupiter's moons, perhaps even a galaxy, NGC 598, say, or M 101. You've been at the University too long. Though there's much to be learned, you've known for some time it need not be learned here. Even the mountains seem smaller. You approach the telescope, stare through the lens and see burning back at you with all its craters and cold light the moon. Hi, Moon. You make your notations, stare a moment longer at the sharpness of the rilles, then walk back for the evening's lecture.

This will be your last Astronomy class because next Tuesday you and a hundred other men from the area are being bused to Little Rock. Friends from back home drop in on you

and your girl friend for the weekend. They want to know what strategies you'll use for evading the draft. You tell them you've fasted for four days, are down now to 115 and haven't slept in seventy-two hours. What else? Well, you are, after all, at the University on a scholarship from Vocational Rehabilitation because you are legally blind in one eye. Do you want some speed? No thanks, you say. No speed, your system couldn't take it.

Because of your work with the blind man in Counselling Psychology you know how to fail your Army intelligence test. You note on your form that you are homosexual and affiliated with the SDS and the KKK. You stand at the trough, your penis out but not pissing, the line behind you grows longer, until the officer overseeing the urinalysis takes your cup and tells you to move on. Another young man cannot give up his urine. You saw his mother putting him on the bus; he did not know exactly how to manage the steps. He, too, fails his intelligence test and is given a further battery with multiple choice questions like, Which weapon would you use to hunt a deer: a) a shotgun, b) a shovel, c) a bow and arrow, d) an exploding device. You are tested, processed, remembered, classified. 1-A. 1-Y. 4-F.

During spring break your father drove up from Texarkana to take you to see your grandparents. Your father had been a captain in the infantry, fighting in France and Germany, and had had a finger shot off, or so your mother told you and your brother, by a German sniper. He never talked about the war,

disdained the VFW, and gave away all his medals. As children, you and your brother weren't allowed to shoot firecrackers near the house. But now, as you drive with him south from Fayetteville to Texarkana, observe his rough, sun-darkened hands on the wheel, smell the sharp gasoline scent of the service station he carries with him, he tells you for the first and last time about his years in the war.

Once, he says, when he was still a corporal, he was transferred to a new unit and sent out on patrol with two other soldiers. They were hiding in a ditch when they saw German troops coming toward them. The soldier on your father's left stood up and walked down the road to meet them, talking in English, talking nonsense to them in English, and the Germans shot him down. The soldier on your father's right raised his rifle, and with the butt of his gun, your father knocked him out. When the German troops passed, your father walked into the road, picked up the body of the soldier, slung it over his shoulder, and carried him for about a mile before he realized the man was dead, then he dropped him and reported back to camp. And where, the captain asked, is the body? Why didn't you bring him in? And your father replied, He's dead, what good is he to us now?

You say nothing; you've nothing to say. You pass Fort Smith, the mountains recede. No one, your father tells you, no one who has experienced combat could possibly wish the experience on anyone else. If you're drafted, if you're 1-A, I hope

you'll go to Canada.

No laughter, no jokes on the bus ride back to the University. The draft lottery is in place. Some have high numbers, some low. It's night, and you hear up and down the aisle the sound of young men crying.

One day in early spring, the trees still bare, the day gray and cold, you drop some organic mescaline and observe the rock you are sitting on melt.

During the student strikes after Kent State, you still attend your classes in Contemporary Poetry, Existentialism, and Creative Writing. Your sympathies go out to the dead, whether or not you read *The Less Deceived*, whether you are studying in class or at home.

On your *Lolita* test you are asked to detail Humbert Humbert's life between 1950 and 1952 with his companion Rita. He "picked her up one depraved May evening somewhere between . . . Toylestown and Blake . . ." One morning they awake to find the amnesic near-albino Jack Humbertson in bed with them, an incident which prompts Humbert to write an essay entitled "Mimir and Memory." When Humbert finally leaves Rita, he tapes his "note of tender adieu" to her navel.

"The mystery of the world," your creative writing professor tells you in conference, paraphrasing Oscar Wilde, "lies in what

we see, not in what we don't see."

The University. Something has gone on here these four years, but what exactly is it?

After graduation you receive your official transcript. "This is a true copy of the permanent record of the student whose name appears above. Honorable Dismissal granted unless otherwise indicated." Someday, you think, you will write a short story about your years at the University, about your first days there after leaving home, about your loves and embarrassments, about your professors, your delight in their quirks, your gratitude for their exposing your failings, about the ideas and ideals of Cardinal Newman, about a Liberal Education, about knowledge being its own end, about the late afternoon light in a classroom in Old Main or walks in winter through campus and into the mountains, about marching on the drill field or looking through the telescopes on their tripods in the amphitheater, about the protests and paranoia of the time, about the suicides, about your father and your army physical—but you never do.

Tom Whalen's fiction has appeared recently in *Agni* (<http://agni.bu.edu>), *Fiction International*, *First Intensity*, *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *Hotel Amerika*, *The Idaho Review*, *The Iowa Review*, *Natural Bridge*, *Northwest Review*, and *The Texas Review*. He lives in Stuttgart, Germany.

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