

GREY MATTERS

AN EXHIBITION OF WORKS FOR THE
CASTLEMAINE STATE FESTIVAL BY

NOBBY SEYMOUR

EXHIBITION DATES:
17TH MARCH – 7TH APRIL, 2013

AT **WOODBINE ART**

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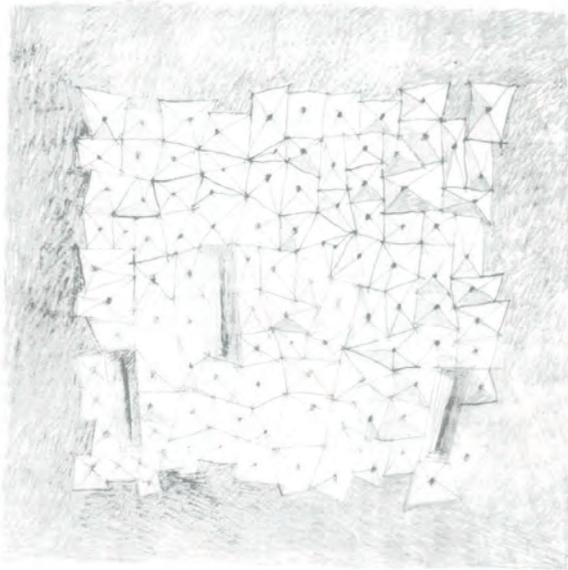
Gallery Hours: Friday – Monday 11am - 5pm
Director: Anita von Bibra

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Rest' by Louise Rippert, 1999



The moment of conception; the initial sketch for *Accommodating Change*.

INTRODUCTION

My attraction to Art, as I recall, was precipitated by a theatre production I saw as a child in which I was transported by the illusion of space and time.

In this introduction to my latest work I muse on the origins of inspiration and the obscure regions from which it emerges. I consider memory and the role it plays in directing our intuition throughout the 'Odyssey' of life each of us must travel.

The fascination for the illusion of Space and Time further developed into my understanding that the material world is an illusion; whereas in the material world the progression is from order to chaos, Art is the antithesis of this process. Form and Order emerge from the unseen, the unconscious, the inchoate.

Where I am now, and the works on show are, I claim, arrived at by intuition; the path taken only becomes apparent in retrospection.

THE WORK ON SHOW

Construction of the twelve artworks comprising this exhibition commenced late February 2010 and was completed in July, 2012. The working title for the concept I had in mind was 'Nebulous Obscurity'; Roman Ingarden, in his book "The Literary Work of Art"¹ spoke of thoughts coming to life against a background of nebulous obscurity.² Henri Bergson, in his book 'Matter and Memory' similarly wrote of 'an immense zone of obscurity'. I was interested in the generation of visual images in the mind and saw them forming against a similar background, which for me was neutral, grey and ghostly. I eventually settled on the title 'Grey Matters'.³

Back in 1999 I had purchased a work by Melbourne artist Louise Rippert. Louise does very delicate work in paper and this particular work, 'Rest'⁴, was constructed from grey tracing and glass paper and the soft grey translucency greatly appealed to me. These memories accumulate in the unconscious and when it came to choosing an appropriate material for my new work, tracing paper registered a clamorous tender. My two previous exhibitions were works in paper and I had worked on tracing paper daily as a young architect. As an architect I had been aware of the paper becoming brittle with age, and in view of the rigorous scratching, scoring and bending I would be imposing on the material I decided to impregnate each sheet with encaustic – a mixture of refined beeswax and Damar varnish. This finish, I subsequently discovered, pleasingly exaggerated the 'greyness' of the material. The writer Andre Gide claimed Grey is the colour of Truth; being midway between two extremes, he may well be right.

The genesis of each of these theatrical works, in which the surface plays the starring role, was a brief sketch – the moment of conception. The 'brief sketch' was often the last of many over a period of weeks but it was the moment of positive intuition, the green light. I have always kept the final work as close as practical to this moment of inspiration; where does inspiration come from? Is it intuition, and what is the nature of intuition?

1 'The Literary Work of Art' by Roman Ingarden, translated by George G. Grabowicz, Northwestern University Press, 1973. (First published in Germany in 1933)

2 Ibid Page 227.

3 Douglas Druitt in fact used the title for a chapter in the catalogue "Gray" (sic) on a retrospective of works in grey by Jasper Johns held at the Chicago Institute of Art and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York in 2008. I presume the term had settled comfortably in the nebulously obscure recesses of my mind when I read the work in 2009.

4 'Rest' by Louise Eve Rippert, 1999. Collage, glassine paper, film gilt, thread and petals. 36 x 36 cm.

INTUITION AND MEMORY: IN THEORY

Is Intuition⁵ the impelling mental process, both in a general sense in our passage through life, and in a specific sense in undertaking any creative endeavour?

I am defining Intuition as 'a non articulated, spontaneous response precipitated by memory, devoid of Ego'. By non articulated I indicate a thought process, not verbalised, proceeding from the unconscious. The Unconscious will be considered further on.

Memory is the residue of Experience. Memory (and Experience) will determine the quality of intuition. This reservoir of Memory and Experience I nominate as Wisdom.

"We are not provided with wisdom we must discover it for ourselves, after a journey through the wilderness which no one else can take for us, an effort which no one can spare us, for our wisdom is the point of view from which we come at last to regard the world."⁶

These are the moving words of Elstir, the character who is an amalgam of prominent artists of the day in Marcel Proust's epic 'In Remembrance of Things Past'. Proust was influenced by Henri Bergson's book, 'Matter and Memory'⁷ which I shall be referring to further on.

Earlier, Elstir says:-

"There is no man, however wise, who has not at some period of his youth said things, or lived in a way that the consciousness of which is so unpleasant to him in later life that he would gladly, if he could, expunge it from his memory. And yet he ought not entirely to regret it, because he cannot be certain that he has indeed become a wise man – so far as it is possible for any of us to be wise – unless he has passed through all the fatuous or unwholesome incarnations by which that ultimate stage must be preceded."⁸

Thus Proust, in his elegant manner, states that the getting of wisdom is not always an elegant process in itself, but I claim it is an essential process in development of intuition.

For all of us Life is an Odyssey; Art is my life and therefore an Odyssey - always moving on, trying new materials, new approaches. Earlier, I quoted Roman Ingarden and his description of the background against which our images or ideas form. He describes it as 'nebulous obscurity'. John Dewey, the American Pragmatic Philosopher describes it as 'a whole that stretches out indefinitely'.⁹ John Dewey gave a series of lectures on Aesthetics at Harvard in 1932 and they were subsequently published as a book, 'Art as Experience'. In speaking of Intuition, he quoted the following words from Tennyson:-

"Experience is an arch wherethro'
Gleams that untravell'd world whose margin fades
Forever and forever when I move."¹⁰

The words were strangely familiar; hardly surprising for, as I was shortly informed, they were from 'Ulysses', a favourite poem of my youth.

5 Robert Morris has referred me to the Shorter OED definition 'The immediate knowledge ascribed to angelic and spiritual beings, with whom vision and knowledge are identical'. (1652)

6 'Remembrance of Things Past' by Marcel Proust. Chatto and Windus, translated by C.K.Scott Moncrieff, reprinted 1971. Vol IV Page 228

7 'Matter and Memory' by Henri Bergson. Dover Philosophical Classics, 2004 (Orig. published 1912)

8 'Proust'. Op.cit. Vol IV, Page 227.

9 'Art as Experience' by John Dewey. Perigee Trade Paperback Edition/ August 2005. Page 201

10 'Ulysses' by Alfred Lord Tennyson.,1833 See appendix for the complete poem

MATTER AND MEMORY

Henri Bergson wrote 'Matter and Memory' in 1896 but I am referring to the edition he revised in 1910. In spite of being awarded the Nobel Prize, his work has been eclipsed by Freud and Jung.

Freud is irrelevant to these musings on Intuition and I prefer Bergson's Unconscious as he integrates the non material and material worlds. He is familiar with the implications of Rudolf Clausius's Laws of Thermodynamics and by 1910 has apparently digested Einstein's Special Theory of Relativity. One could suggest he anticipates String Theory before its origins fifty years later.¹¹

I found his argument confusing and untidily laid down but this may be the result of poor translation or differences in interpretation over the span of a century. Rather than reproduce large tracts of his writing, allow me to attempt a contemporary précis of his account of the Conscious Being moving through time.

Bergson sees Consciousness rather as we see the Arrow of Time. (The term 'Arrow of Time' originates from the science of thermodynamics, with which Bergson appears acquainted; whether the term was in use in his time, I do not know. I am using it in the macro sense in which The Arrow moves towards a future of increased entropy.) Returning back along the shaft from the Arrow Head are our successive recollections set out in time. At the sharp tip of the Arrow Head is the fleeting present. (Bergson sees the present only as a hypothetical concept. Our Consciousness is at this point where the past immediately becomes the future.)¹²

Beyond the Arrow Head, forever, are all the objects to be perceived and all the events to be experienced.

Behind the Arrow Head lies our Unconscious.

Bergson summarises it thus:-

"...our previous psychical life exists for us even more than the external world of which we never perceive more than a very small part, whereas we use the whole of our lived experience."¹³

In summary, the intuitive action proceeds from our Unconscious, precipitated mostly by memory. Instances of perceptual leaps in the development of knowledge indicate that the possibility of occasional contact with Jung's Collective Unconscious may occur.

The fructification of Intuitive action may not be of any consequence in its time. I am reminded of the great Swiss mathematician, Leonhard Euler, who in the eighteenth century derived a calculus of variations. (I am claiming this as the result of intuition.) At the time they were derided for being totally useless, just math for math's sake. Two hundred years later they were used for encryption in the global transfer of large sums of money and ultimately they were the means by which the multi-dimensional space of String Theory knotted together.¹⁴ Inventing the wheel is one thing, but it really comes into its own when some one invents the barrow.

The world is obsessed with the floodlit stage and the sole actor, but building a platform in the wings from which our sequined star leaps into view of the expectant throng is an important ancillary role.

11 'Matter thus resolves itself into numberless vibrations, all linked together in uninterrupted continuity, all bound up with each other, and travelling in every direction like shivers through an immense body.-' 'Matter and Memory', op. cit P 276

12 'It is at this present moment when mind, thought, ego and the senses are at rest, that intuition arises. It is at this moment when Consciousness is the light shed on the illusion of the creation and is the light from which intuition springs.' Garry Martin, 2012. (Garry Martin is a friend from architecture student days. He is a student of eastern philosophies and Sanskrit, and currently mentors architecture students in applying philosophical awareness to their design strategies.)

13 Bergson. Op.cit Page 188

14 See Euler, Leonhard in 'Q is for Quantum' by John Gribbin. Published by Wiedenfeld and Nicolson 1998. Page 127.

INTUITION AND MEMORY: IN PRACTICE

The reservoir of Memory and Experience starts at empty. The first input I recall occurred in 1951 when my mother took me to see a show at His Majesty's Theatre¹⁵ in Exhibition St, Melbourne. Being a country boy from near Penola, South Australia, I had never seen theatre or cinema - and television was not to arrive in Australia for another five years. It was 'Brigadoon'¹⁶, a musical romance partly set in a parallel universe, by Lerner and Loewe. The curtain went up and my conscious being was sucked through the proscenium; I don't think it has ever fully re-emerged. You may have seen the Powell and Pressburger classic Ballet Film (Red Shoes) starring Moira Shearer, Anton Wallbrook and Marius Goring and of course a lad from nearby Mt. Gambier, Robert Helpman. In the film the camera tracks from the auditorium, through the proscenium and into a universe no longer bounded by the wings of the stage. I saw the film for the first time only recently and it transported me back to that magic occasion. When I returned to my home in the country, after seeing 'Brigadoon', I spent my spare hours and limited resources constructing elaborate stage settings complete with lighting effects – I used torch bulbs and batteries.

At the age of nine I was packed off to boarding school, where the Art Room became my sanctuary, and then Architecture at Melbourne University, but much as Architecture interests me today, my focus then was elsewhere; I moved on to working under Rod Thorley who was one of the leading Architectural Delineators at that time. Architectural Delineation is the artist's view of a completed building while it still only exists in plan form. It's done on computers today but under the aegis of Rod's enormous skill I became very adept at handling architectural perspective.

I was restless though and travelled to Europe for a couple of years, worked as a genealogist, returned to Melbourne and worked as a waiter, then in catering and eventually cooking board room lunches in Collins St, but always painting in my spare time.

¹⁵ The theatre in the Reign of King George VI, was thus known.

¹⁶ 'Brigadoon'. – a musical written by Lerner and Loewe, 1947. Produced in Australia by JC Williamson Ltd. at His Majesty's Theatre, Melbourne in 1951. Two Madison Ave. executives hunting in the Scottish highlands stumble through the mist into a village community, Brigadoon, which briefly conjoins with our space/time continuum once a century (in our time). One character (Gene Kelly) falls in love with a bonnie lassie and with the aid of Deus ex machina, love triumphs at the expense of Madison Avenue.



Detail of a mural painted on the wall in a Meeting Room for an Advertising Company in Melbourne. The wall reflected the Interior Design of other walls in the office and framed an illusionary adjacent room under construction. Mind the scaffold plank!



Adding a vertical dimension; this gives the dead end of a corridor a lift. (Palm Beach. Fla. U.S.A.)



The existing two Birch trees in this small Melbourne courtyard were an instant inspiration for a two dimensional extension to the space.

In 1984, in one of those apparently non sequitur events in life which I am sure must happen to us all, I was commissioned to paint a trompe l'oeil window on the interior wall of a grand house in Sydney, which although close to the harbour, lacked the celebrated view. I provided it, glimpsed through elegant glass doors.

Generated by all that past experience of scenic illusion and mastering perspective, a talent for Trompe L'oeil mural painting had apparently been fomenting and for the next twelve years I earned an honest living deceiving people, here in Australia and overseas. A critical factor in successful trompe l'oeil is the portal, where the 'actual' shifts effortlessly to the 'virtual', just as I had slipped effortlessly that day nearly thirty three years previously through the 'portal', or proscenium of His Majesty's Theatre.

Clambering up and down scaffolds and crawling over wet concrete slabs loses its charm once you turn fifty and I felt it was time to strike a new course in the Odyssey. Technically proficient but lacking any formal education in Fine Arts, I decided to embark on being a studio painter. Working solely in two dimensions depressed me. Intuition steered me towards complex three dimensional structures requiring technical ingenuity, and the depression lifted.

Watching a documentary on Winston Churchill, one sees him building brick walls around Chartwell, to allay what he called the 'Black Dog' of depression. Obviously for some of us, using both sides of the brain is a necessary mode of preserving sanity.

Working during these years with the illusion of space inexorably led to an interest in the illusion of matter and reading all the books I could find written for the layman interested in Quantum Physics. It has been an enormous comfort to discover that we do not exist, well, not in any material form, – something the mystics and prophets have been telling us all along, but being a doubter I am reassured by the equations and empirical evidence that have emerged over the last hundred years to back up the Prophets. The physical and the metaphysical appear to have conflated.¹⁷

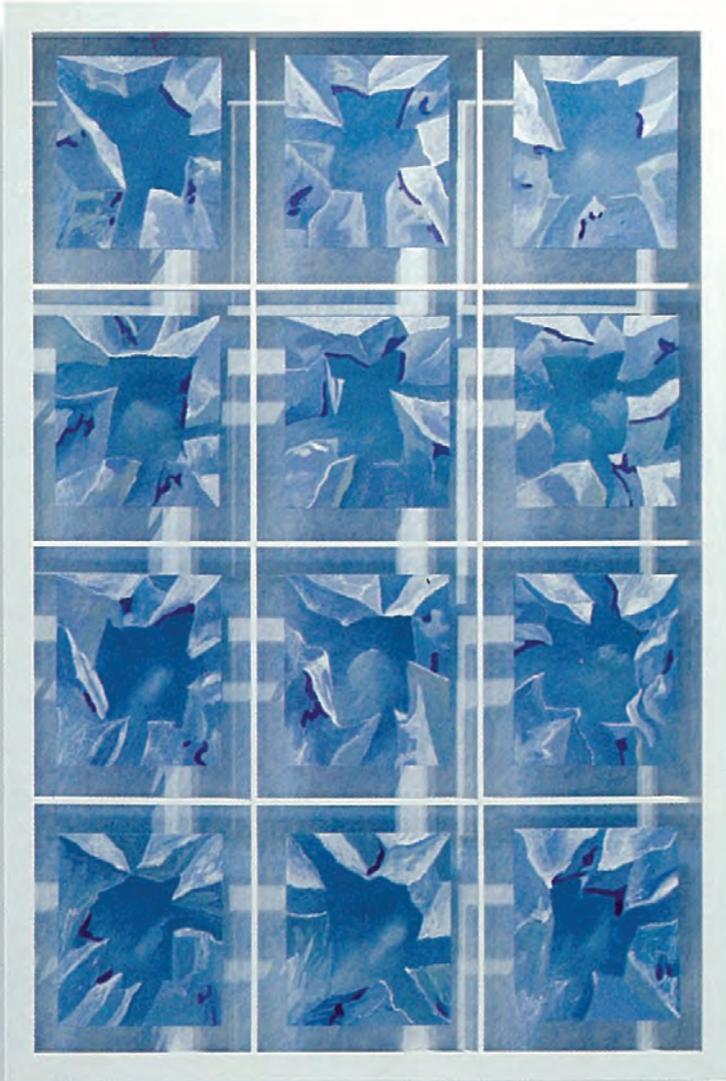
Those who insist you stand on a concrete base of reality, consider this; Fred Hoyle, The British Astronomer, estimated the mean density of the universe at 10-26 gms/cm³.¹⁸ Picture this as one grain of sand within a volume occupied by planet Earth. Analyse the grain of sand and we reciprocate the matter quotient at a micro scale and at the furthest imaginable scale of sub-atomic particle theory we finally end up with quivering filaments of – what? (The reason why the near nothingness of your feet doesn't fall through the near nothingness of your concrete base of reality is because the basic particles of matter, fermions, in your feet repulse the fermions in your concrete base.)¹⁹

With the advent of Modernism, any form of Illusionism in Art fell into disfavour. In light of our current understanding of the structure of the universe, then our sensible realisation of it is in fact an illusion and therefore, I argue, the use of illusion to represent it is quite valid. Possibly my excitement at the theatre over sixty years ago was prescient of this understanding.

17 See 'About Planck Time', Appendix.

18 I have not been able to relocate the original source of this remarkable estimate. However it is proximate with other estimates. Alan Guth, The American Physicist, estimated the critical density of the universe as 'somewhere between 2 and 8 hydrogen atoms per cubic yard' (Guth, Alan K.H. 'The Inflationary Universe', New York: Addison Wesley. 1997:22

19 I addressed the ambiguity of our perception of Matter in an earlier exhibition, 'Cast by Shadows' (2007) in which one reads the shadow plane cast by the panels as equivalent to the plane of the panel itself. See www.nobbyseymour.com.au – 'Cast by Shadows'



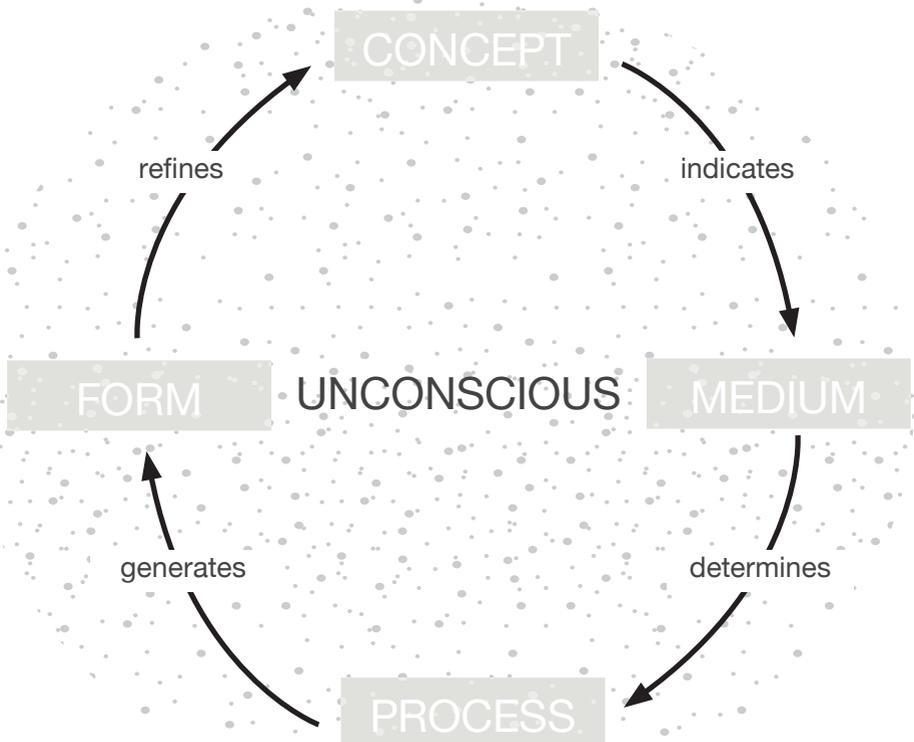
From the exhibition 'Cast By Shadows'; the shadows cast by the painted panels floating against a neutral background create an ambiguous picture plane and an illusory material surface.

FORM AND SCHEMA

'Every material carries within itself an inherent form'; this maxim, from the Russian Constructivist Vladimir Tatlin's "A Treatise on the Culture of Materials"²⁰ had a major influence on Twentieth Century Art and Design, Mondrian and the Bauhaus in Europe and most American artists coming after the Modern Movement who are household names today – including of course Pollock – (think of house paint, it pours and it drips). It is an epoch in Art which greatly appeals to me and is especially relevant when working in paper. What can you do with paper? You can cut, tear, score, fold scrape and burn it, and bearing this maxim in mind a form which uniquely expresses the nature of the material emerges. 'Shadowland'²¹ and 'Luminous Voids'²², my first two exhibitions comprising works in paper dealt with shadow filled voids which denied the ability to resolve any depth of field and thus integrated the illusions of both Space and Matter.

Attending to these current works I became aware of a schema taking shape against my 'nebulous obscurity'; it is a pattern of action and I call it 'the Eternal Cycle'.

It is an open circuit (like a helix) and can be entered at any point. The schema functions against that nebulous background, the unconscious.



20 I have not read 'A Treatise on the Culture of Materials' See Magdalena Dabrowsky's chapter 'Beyond Constructivism: Richard Serra's Drawings' from 'Richard Serra Drawing – A Retrospective' Published by the Menil Foundation, Inc 2012

21 Shadowland, 2008 @ www.nobryseymour.com.au

22 Luminous Voids, 2009 @ *ibid.*

THE TRIUMPH OF INTUITION

Intuition is Intelligence. Problems shift to the periphery of our Conscious (that is, our Unconscious) while the Conscious grapples with our Ego.

A solution emerges from the 'nebulous obscurity', a possible course of action is proposed, but not always heard through the clamour of our Ego.

IN REVIEW

Allow me to adapt the list of this brief summary of my sensible experience along the shaft of 'The Arrow of Time' I formerly ascribed to Mr. Bergson. At the far end of the shaft (most distant from the arrow head) we have:-

* The Experience of Theatre

(I witness the Illusion of Space and Time)

*Architecture and Perspective

(The Structure of Space – learning the rules)

*Murals (Trompe L'oeil)

(I put my learning of the rules into practice)

*Work in three Dimensions

(The illusion of Space and Matter and the Nature of Matter)

- And now we hover at the tip of 'The Arrow of Time' – at the Present – and consider the nature of Consciousness. (This parallel with the 'Arrow of Time' that I alluded to in Intuition and memory in Theory is entirely coincidental, synchronistic.

At any present moment we are blind to the intuitive but the path we have taken intuitively reveals itself to us in retrospect.

What's next? Who knows, do any of us? I haven't known since the curtain came down on 'Brigadoon' in 1951. I do have a couple of ideas – but best I leave it to Intuition.

September, 2012.

APPENDIX

ULYSSES

It little profits that an idle king,
By this still hearth, among these barren crags,
Match'd with an aged wife, I mete and dole
Unequal laws unto a savage race,
That hoard, and sleep, and feed, and know not me.
I cannot rest from travel: I will drink
Life to the lees: all times I have enjoy'd
Greatly, have suffered greatly, both with those
That loved me, and alone; on shore, and when
Thro scudding drifts the rainy Hyades
Vext the dim sea: I am become a name:
For always roaming with a hungry heart
Much have I seen and known; cities of men
And manners, climates, councils, governments,
Myself not least, but honour'd of them all;
And drunk delight of battle with my peers,
Far on the ringing plains of windy Troy.
I am part of all that I have met;
Yet all experience is an arch where thro'
Gleams that untravell'd world, whose margin fades
Forever and for ever when I move.
How dull it is to make a pause, to make an end,
To rust unburnish'd, not to shine in use!
As tho to breathe were life. Life piled on life
Were all too little, and of one to me
Little remains: but every hour is sav'd
From that eternal silence, something more,
A bringer of new things; and vile it were
For some three suns to store and hoard myself,
And this gray spirit yearning in desire
To follow knowledge, like a sinking star,
Beyond the utmost bound of human thought.
This is my son, mine own Telemachus,
To whom I leave the sceptre and the isle –
Well lov'd of me, discerning to fulfil
This labour, by slow prudence to make mild
A rugged people, and thro' soft degrees
Subdue them to the useful and the good.
Most blameless is he, centred in the sphere
Of common duties, decent not to fail
In offices of tenderness, and pay
Meet adoration to my household gods'
When I am gone. He works his work, I mine.
There lies the port: the vessel puffs her sail:
There gloom the dark broad seas. My mariners,
Souls that have toil'd, and wrought, and thought with me –
That ever with a frolic welcome took
The thunder and the sunshine, and oppos'd
Free hearts, free foreheads – you and I are old;
Old age hath yet his honour and his toil;
Death closes all: but something ere the end,
Some work of noble note may yet be done,
Not unbecoming men that strive with Gods.
The lights begin to twinkle from the rocks;
The long day wanes: the slow moon climbs: the deep
Moans round with many voices. Come my friends,
'Tis not too late to seek a newer world.
Push off, and sitting well in order smite
The sounding furrows: for my purpose holds
To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths
Of all the western stars, until I die.
It may be that the gulfs will wash us down:
It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles,
And see the great Achilles, whom we knew.
Tho much is taken, much abides; and tho'
We are now that strength which in old days
Mov'd earth and heaven; that which we are, we are;
One equal temper of heroic hearts,
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

ABOUT PLANCK TIME

Once upon a time, way back in the infinitesimal
First fraction of a second attending our creation,
A tiny drop containing all of it, all energy
And all its guises, burst upon the scene,
Exploding out of nothing into everything
Virtually instantaneously, the way our thoughts
Leap eagerly to occupy the abhorrent void.
Once, say ten or twenty billion years ago,
In Planck time, in no time at all, the veil
Available to our perceptions was flung out
Over space at such a rate the mere imagination
Cannot keep up, so rapidly the speed of light
Lags miraculously behind, producing a series
Of incongruities that has led our curiosity,
Like Ariadne's thread, through the dim labyrinth
Of our conclusions to the place of our beginning.
In Planck time, everything that is was spread so thin
That all distance is enormous, between each star,
Between subatomic particles, so that we are composed
Almost entirely of emptiness, so that what separates
This world, bright ball floating in its midnight blue,
From the irrefutable logic of no world at all
Has no more substance than the traveller's dream,
So that nothing can be said for certain except
That sometime, call it Planck time, it will all just
Disappear, a parlor trick, a rabbit back in its hat,
Will all go up in a flash of light, abracadabra,
An idea that isn't being had any more.

GEORGE BRADLEY

George Bradley was born in Roslyn NY in 1953. Educated at Yale and the University of Virginia he is the recipient of a number of poetry prizes and honours. Poet Eric Ormsby writes of him: - "Bradley is a learned poet; he deploys echoes of Milton and Auden and Christopher Smart, as well as the Bible, but does so with such wry panache that the illusions are constantly refreshed."
He has also worked as a construction foreman, a sommelier and advertising copywriter.
See www.poetryfoundation.org/bio/george_bradley

ELSTIR'S SPEECH

"There is no man, however wise, who has not at some period of his youth said things, or lived in a way the consciousness of which is so unpleasant to him in later life that he would gladly, if he could, expunge it from his memory. And yet he ought not entirely to regret it, because he cannot be certain that he has indeed become a wise man — so far as it is possible for any of us to be wise — unless he has passed through all the fatuous or unwholesome incarnations by which that ultimate stage must be preceded. I know that there are young fellows, the sons and grandsons of famous men, whose masters have instilled into them nobility of mind and moral refinement in their schooldays. They have, perhaps, when they look back upon their past lives, nothing to retract; they can, if they choose, publish a signed account of everything they have ever said or done; but they are poor creatures, feeble descendants of doctrinaires, and their wisdom is negative and sterile. We are not provided with wisdom, we must discover it for ourselves, after a journey through the wilderness which no one else can take for us, an effort which no one can spare us, for our wisdom is the point of view from which we come at last to regard the world. The lives that you admire, the attitudes that seem noble to you are not the result of training at home, by a father, or by masters at school, they have sprung from beginnings of a very different order, by reaction from the influence of everything evil or commonplace that prevailed roundabout them. They represent a struggle and a victory. I can see that the picture of what we once were, in early youth, may not be recognisable and cannot, certainly, be pleasing to contemplate in later life. But we must not deny the truth of it, for it is evidence that we have really lived, that it is in accordance with the laws of life and of the mind that we have, from the common elements of life, of the life of studios, of artistic groups — assuming that one is a painter — extracted something that goes beyond them."
Proust, Marcel: *Within a Budding Grove*, p.227-8

GREY MATTERS – ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.

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