

Barton Fink

Have You Seen the *Herald*?

As outlined in the introduction, there is no unitary spectator and no univocal meaning. Viewers adapt films to their own inner world and hermeneutic orientation. This film reminded many genuinely literate commentators of the grotesque, nightmarish, menacing style of Franz Kafka. Being necessarily limited to his realm of experience, which did not include these works, this writer did not have such an impression. Nonetheless, because of his slight familiarity with the novels of James Joyce, there was a perception of what seemed to be persistent echoes of those works. These will be considered throughout this essay, with additional discussion at the end. Several subsequent essays will explore additional instances of what appears to be wholesale borrowing from much older literary sources. Naturally, however, because of the acknowledged subjectivity of these essays, the suggested affinities should not be overestimated.

Viewers of this film will recall that such cephalic references as *head*, *mind* and *brain* eventually acquire deeper meaning retrospectively. They also match similar material in *Miller's Crossing*, as when instructions to shoot a victim in the brain are repeatedly given, and when Caspar says, "I said *head*! Head . . . Co-heads!" Additional insight into these references is offered by Mark Horowitz in "Coen Brothers A-Z: The Big Two-Headed Picture" (*Film Comment*, volume 27, number 5, Sept.-Oct. 1991). Likewise, words such as *Christ*, *Jesus*, *hell* and *damn* may be more than idle expletives, and none should be taken for granted.

Boilerplate criticism of the Coens' films attributes to them a cold, heartless chill. Heart and warmth are not unwelcome, at least to the extent that they are not merely code words for maudlin, juvenile sentimentality nor the basis of an *argumentum ad populum*, commerce being the concern of merchants, not critics.

This film's overproduced DVD menu depicts the Hotel Earle ablaze, and so is itself a kind of unavoidable spoiler. The first image in the film proper is of wallpaper of the sort that Barton will encounter in Los Angeles, but of a somewhat different hue. An expository caption places the action in New York city in 1941, the year that James Joyce died. The curtain raiser for this film is the end of a play. As John Turturro's Barton Fink looks on, an actor on stage is heard speaking with John Turturro's voice. As if to reveal Barton's inner subjective experience, the actor is literally speaking the author's mind with the author's voice. Most explicitly and superficially, Barton resembles Clifford Odets (1906-1963), the zealously rhetorical playwright who championed the urban middle class.

The character on stage, named simply "Actor" in the published screenplay, mentions "these four stinkin' walls, six flights up." Barton's room at the Hotel Earle will have peculiar walls and will be on the sixth floor. He then speaks of "the el that roars . . . like a cast-iron wind." Though inaudible in the film, the screenplay also has him saying, "I'm blowin' out of here, blowin' for good." These references to wind and blowing introduce the theme of air and, by implication, inspiration. Two of the characters in the play are named Maury and Lil. Barton's uncle and mother are named Maury and Lillian, respectively. The "Actor" speaks of being "awake." Resurrection is said to symbolize awaking from unconsciousness, and the Buddha is

literally the awakened one. He declares, "Well, my eyes are open now," as the serpent tells Eve that hers will be. These references, together with the mention of a choir, suggest the title of Odets's play *Awake and Sing!* of 1935.

(The author now indulges himself by digressing for a defensive aside regarding the word *Odets's*. This possessive construction for multisyllable singular proper names is supported by Kate L. Turabian in her *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations* and by Mary-Claire van Leunen in her *A Handbook for Scholars*. The latter, while insisting on uniformity among singular possessives "regardless of the root word," also states that such possessives as *Odets's* "may be pronounced if you like with only one final [s or z] sound . . . by an interesting phenomenon called haplology." Turabian makes an exception for multisyllable Greek names ending in *es*.)

Returning to the play within the film, the reference to fish could be an oblique allusion either to Christ or to the powers lurking in the unconscious, both of which are consistent motifs in this film. Indeed, the proximity of the call of "FRESH FISH" is like the proclamation of Barton as a new Christ figure. The actor designated as Lily in the screenplay says, "It's late, Maury." As he responds with the concluding words of the play, "Not any more, Lil. It's early," Barton simultaneously mouths the last two. At the time that this action is occurring, *Citizen Kane* is a contemporary film. In it, when Emily says, "It's late," Kane corrects her, saying, "It's early." *Citizen Kane* also contains a reference to "a dame without a head." The cries of "Author!" echo Stephen Dedalus contemplating ontological authorship in James Joyce's *Ulysses* when he thinks, "Signatures of all things I am here to read."

A barking dog is heard as the restaurant is entered. Barton meets Richard St. Clair, whose name suggests divine radiance, and Poppy Carnahan, who is possibly a relative of Michael Caine's Peachy Carnahan. Poppy is the source of opium, which facilitates altered states of consciousness. Poppy's necklace features a hand with two fingers extended in the manner of *le main de justice*. It recalls the earrings given to Frida Kahlo by Pablo Picasso, which are featured in her 1940 painting *Self-Portrait Dedicated to Dr. Eloesser*.

Wherever possible, each of these essays is subtitled using a motto selected from within the film under consideration in order to isolate the central theme of the essay. The question "Have you seen the *Herald*?" sounds like a Jungian, archetypal pun, and will be valid and significant throughout the film, especially in the its final moments. Barton replies, significantly, "Not yet."

The newspaper drama critic whose review is read is named Caven. Caves are associated with death, but also with initiation, fertility, rebirth and the search for meaning and esoteric wisdom hidden in the depths of the unconscious. The dragons that they sometimes harbor, which represent restriction and confinement, will be dealt with more extensively in subsequent essays. It suffices here to note that the critic in question "could hardly contain himself." Plato's *Republic* features the epistemological allegory of the cave, with its assertion that one's task is to escape the realm of illusory shadows and figments. The interior of a cave is a timeless refuge, where day and night are indistinguishable. Barton will soon reside in a hotel with similar properties.

When, in Joyce's *Ulysses*, Stephen Dedalus smashes the lamp in the brothel, he calls out the name of Siegfried's sword: "Nothung!" This may be analyzed into "not hung," a reminder that his goal is to avoid traps such as, metaphorically, nooses. Barton too should be on guard, as the name of his producer (Derek) is a homophone of a type of gallows. The title of Barton's play is taken from the fourth line of Shakespeare's sonnet #73. Caven's review reads, in part, "The playwright finds nobility in the most squalid corners and poetry in the most calloused speech."

Anthony Burgess asserts that “the discovery of epiphanies – ‘showings forth’ – of beauty and truth in the squalid and commonplace was Joyce’s vocation.” Lipnick will later remind Barton that there is plenty of poetry right inside that ring. The review mentions fishmongers and Barton makes an additional reference to fish.

Poppy says, “You dog!” Richard’s baying echoes the dog heard at the opening of the scene. This, together with his surname, creates an association between caninity and holy radiance. Joyce toyed with the anagrammatical relation of *dog* and *god*, which is also exploited in the old joke about the dyslexic agnostic insomniac. Behind what the screenplay calls the “insistent jingling” of the pageboy’s bell, the end of the scene is punctuated with the same barking heard at its beginning. This could, of course, be accidental. But it seems unlikely that the trouble would be taken to ensure that the scene began and ended with barking for no good reason. Neither is this the last time a dog will be heard. Christian Metz asserts that cinematographic signification is never arbitrary and cinematic connotation is always symbolic.

The dog can represent either impurity and base temptation or fidelity. It is associated with spiritual aspirations trapped in animal form, and there is a line in the review of Barton’s play about “longing for something higher.” The dog Cerberus guards the threshold to the underworld, to which Barton is metaphorically headed. Argus is the dog of Odysseus and is also the name of the newspaper in the Coens’ *The Hudsucker Proxy*.

As the revelation of divine wisdom is for those with the ears to hear, the herald appears to the psyche that is ripe for transformation. Inspiration comes to the worthy, whose inward readiness earns them outward fulfillment. Thus Barton is summoned to the bar for his invitation to Hollywood. One of many heralds in this story, the character who pages Barton is uncredited, but the Coens, perhaps to compensate, went to the trouble of posing for a photograph with him that was included in the press kit and has subsequently appeared in various publications. It is also claimed that the person in question is actually Barry Sonnenfeld, this being the first Coen film in which he did not act as cinematographer. As director of *RV*, he would later display in that film what will soon be shown to be the motto of the Hotel Earle: “A DAY OR A LIFETIME.”

Barton meets Garland, whose name suggests flowers. Barton fears cutting himself off from the common man and claims not to care about success, but when asked if he has seen Caven’s review, he lies and says, “No. What did it say?”

Following the prologue in New York, a new world center is now established in Hollywood, but by way of a transitional shot of a Southern California beach, anticipated by a rumble reminiscent of the standing ovation that followed Barton’s play. Since Barton is now in Hollywood, the closest beach would probably be Santa Monica, whose name recalls Sandy Mount in Dublin, where some of the action of Joyce’s novels occurs.

Joseph Campbell claims that the stable climate of the tropics produces Eastern religions that emphasize eternity rather than the critical temporal thresholds stressed in the more dynamically seasonal West. The hotel lobby in which Barton is discovered is distinctly tropical in character, which would be in keeping with a place out of time. This is reinforced by the bell, which resounds perpetually until stifled and which echoes what the screenplay calls the “insistent jingling” of the pageboy’s bell.

After knocking is heard from an unseen source, a man emerges as if from the underworld. The name of the Hotel Earle echoes the last line of Barton’s play: “It’s early.” As if to heighten the irony, the clerk says, “Everything seems to be in order.” This is then repeated for emphasis. Early in *The Crying Game*, it is similarly said, “The situation is simple.” The register

is spun as if to establish the immovable spot at the center of the universe (*axis mundi*), and counterclockwise at that, suggesting the left-hand path (see below). The axis of rotation coincides with optical axis, around which the camera also rotates.

Barton is asked whether he is “a trans or a res.” This could easily stand for transcendent (temporally disengaged) or resurrectant/resurgent (temporally involved). The choice could also be inferred to be transpersonal or resistant, Barton being the latter. The name of the clerk is given as CHET! and then repeated. It is shown written to confirm the spelling, as it will be again later. If the *E* and the exclamation point in this name were exchanged, the latter would resemble an inverted dotted *I*. If the *E* is ignored, the result is the sanskrit word *chit*, which means “consciousness.” Retention of the *E* would yield *chite*, which resembles *shite*, an expletive used in *Ulysses*.

Barton is uncomfortable in the presence of a common man and seems to be having a hard time finding “nobility in the most squalid corners.” CHET! welcomes Barton not to Hollywood, but to Los Angeles, with a hard *g*. Thus, it is represented in its aspect as the city not of the angels, but of the angles, both in the sense of devious strategies and of the Anglo-Saxon majority. These factors contribute to marginalize the idealistic and Jewish Barton. And since an “angler” is a type of fisherman, additional fish imagery is suggested. (Also recall the confusion that gave rise to the angled horn becoming known as the English horn.) Looking back to *Miller’s Crossing*, after Caspar pronounces *Los Angeles* the same way, Leo says to Tom, “Okay, Tom, you know all the angles – Christ, better than anybody.”

It has been noted elsewhere that “six” is spoken thrice during Barton’s elevator ride, yielding the satanic 666. Barton’s room is on the sixth floor, recalling the “six flights up” in his play. The rush of air (*spiritus*) heard when Barton opens the door to his room recalls the Starship Enterprise, and will be recalled in *The Hudsucker Proxy* when a sign on a door warns of “AIR CURRENTS.” The difficulty in opening the window emphasizes the isolation of the room that Barton means to be his monastic scriptorium. Barton’s typewriter is an Underwood, an appropriate brand for writing in the underworld.

After considering his art vehicle for a moment, Barton notices the pencil, paper and envelopes provided. The letterhead features the apparent equation of “A day or a lifetime.” Units of time are irrelevant in a realm transcendent of that dimension. Calendar time vanishes in the dream realm. Since the poet is said to soar above time, Barton should not feel out of place. The writing supplies that seem unused since time immemorial perhaps embody a pun as “stationary.” This may also indicate an absence of inspiration for literary composition in this room. The hotel is said to have been established in 1909. Clifford Odets was born in 1906.

Barton looks up, sees a picture of what the screenplay calls “a bathing beauty” and enters a state of aesthetic arrest that lasts more than half a minute. This is what A. J. Ayer calls “that pause of contemplative regard which suspends the active interests of further purposes.” It is like Parzival’s trance when he sees the bloody goose on the snow. It is under these conditions that time dissolves and eternity is glimpsed. (A later essay will relate such experiences to the phases of aesthetic apprehension according to Aquinas.) Thus does the “beauty” beckon as if from another world. Anticipating the film’s finale, Barton is transported to the extent of imagining the nondiegetic sound of the surf depicted in the picture as well as the sound of sea birds.

In *Ulysses*, Leopold Bloom has a picture on his bedroom wall called *The Bath of the Nymph*. In his video series *Wings of Art*, Joseph Campbell asserts that this is what is referred to by the title “Calypso” given to chapter 4 of that novel. Henceforth, this will be the name assigned in this essay to Barton’s “bathing beauty.”

The male principle is usually portrayed mythologically as dormant until activated by the female. The stimulating energy, *shakti* in Sanskrit, is female, like the Muses. Barton will encounter several such figures. A man's opposite-sex soul image, his anima, is a source of his creativity, a reconciler of conflict and an intermediary between conscious and unconscious. Barton would do well to respect and pay attention to her physical manifestations.

Odets created many small paintings himself. In an article titled "Clifford Odets: Anguish of Many Colors in Paintings" for the *Art Review* section of *The New York Times*, 4/26/96, Roberta Smith writes that Odets wrote screenplays in Hollywood "while awaiting inspiration." He produced paintings with some of the following titles and features relevant to this film: *War Scene*, *Uneasy Slumber*, featuring interesting wallpaper; *Swamp* (it is not known whether this is a complete or a partial title), which is where mosquitoes breed; *House of Evil*, featuring "compartmentalized sexual shenanigans" like this film's "love birds"; *Othello, Last Act*, in which Othello's hand is green, like Barton's wallpaper; *In Hell + Why*, *Working at Night* and *Asylum*.

Barton retires to bed, but is not alone. Richard T. Jameson, in the same issue of *Film Comment* cited above, writes of Barton being confronted with "the whining mosquito of doubt." In Schubert's last song, "*Die Taubenpost*," the pigeon's name is *Sehnsucht* ("longing"). As when Barton signs the register, the scene ends with a rotating overhead shot that will come to be associated with the mosquito.

Hell represents isolation from love and compassion, bondage by fear and desire, and absolute commitment to earthly experience and limitations. Joyce equates Dublin with hell. Hollywood may be getting a similar treatment here. A decade prior to Barton's arrival in Hollywood, P.G. Wodehouse called it "the abode of the damned." Nevertheless, the hero's journey involves his travel from the ordinary world, which is a wasteland in need of a cure, to a challenging, unfamiliar, special world, and his return with the cure. Dorothy has to leave Kansas and travel to Oz to learn the value of home. If Barton's lesson is not learned in New York, then maybe it will be in Hollywood.

Barton enters Jack Lipnick's office and is greeted with language that prefigures the wrestling dailies: "Let me at him. Let me put my arms around this guy." Calypso seems to have extended her influence from the previous scene into this one, as the doorway to Lipnick's office is flanked by male figures supporting globes, in the manner of the Greek mythological Titan Atlas, who is Calypso's father. Barton greets Lipnick no more enthusiastically than he does CHET!

Jack Lipnick is a composite of historical studio heads. His first name is like that of Jack Warner, while his last name is like that of David Selznick. He comes from Minsk, which is where Louis B. Mayer was born. "To be honest" is something that Barton will say again to Lipnick much later.

In Odets's play *Awake and Sing!*, mention is made of a movie with Wallace Beery. Just such a film is now assigned to Barton. In Lipnick's genre list, the comma between "screwball" and "Bible" might almost be taken to be optional. Lipnick's disavowal of "B pictures" foreshadows his ultimate refusal to produce Barton's film. The phrase "his hopes, his dreams" will be repeated in *The Hudsucker Proxy*. Foreshadowing also occurs with talk of "a bad element" and "romantic interest." Moments after a denial of phallic threat, Lipnick's mention of "the drill" perhaps signals its resumption. He implies the Jungian feeling function when he expresses a desire for "that Barton Fink feeling." Barton and Lipnick also respectively demonstrate the Jungian attitudes of introversion and extraversion.

With something expected by the end of the week, Barton is now faced with a critical temporal deadline, which is incompatible with the eternity of the Hotel Earle. Serving as a mouthpiece for many critics of the Coens, Lipnick acknowledges a certain fixation on the head when he declares a need for “more heart in motion pictures.” (In *Miller’s Crossing*, when Bernie, with his last words, begs Tom, “Look in your heart!” Tom, with the punctuation given in the published screenplay, replies, “What heart.”) The end of the scene is audibly punctuated by the rush of air as the door closes, which was not heard when it opened.

The hotel hallway is lined with shoes. All humans, who are not otherwise in evidence, have withdrawn, but their shoes remain, like the accidents of transubstantiated bread. Shoes are typically removed when entering a house in Japan, the country with which war is imminent. Such is also the practice in preparation for walking on holy ground, as when entering a mosque. This symbolism is featured in Jan van Eyck’s 1434 portrait of the Arnolfinis and will be encountered in several ensuing essays.

Barton’s typing is the only audible indication of life. The emphasis on sound continues as a close-up of Barton’s screenplay shows the word *audible* being typed. In spite of the rush of air associated with Barton’s door, his fan is running and yet the streamers on it hang limp, indicating the absence of inspiration (*spiritus*). The broken vertical member on the typewriter mechanism, suggests impotence or castration. The missing piece is on the left. Though analyzed further in subsequent essays, in the current context, the left-hand path may be taken as that of creativity and novelty.

Sound comes from behind the picture on the wall in front of Barton, as if from beyond the visible world. The wallpaper resembles that seen during titles, including when the caption “NEW YORK CITY, 1941” is displayed. This could have been simple foreshadowing or the suggestion of an abstract state transcendent of space and without physical concrete location. Air again rushes past the door when Barton opens and closes it, as if ironically to signify the inspiration that is eluding him.

Barton’s room number is 621. The significance of the sum of these digits will be suggested below. Taken as a date (June 21), it is Saint John’s Day. Joseph Campbell makes much of the fact that Bloomsday (June 16) is near summer solstice. June 21 is even nearer. (The essay on *Heavenly Creatures* will elaborate on this issue.) Charlie is in room 623. Joseph Campbell ultimately interpreted the recurring number 1132 in Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake* as referring to Romans 11:32. Romans 6:23 contains the phrase “The wages of sin is death.”

Barton and Charlie are in adjacent rooms that are not consecutively numbered. This is a perfectly normal numbering system that is also used for street addresses. They simply occupy rooms on the side of the hall with odd numbers, so the intervening number 622 is not missed. Nevertheless, as if nature abhorred a vacuum, the number 622 makes a delayed appearance in the Coens’ next film, *The Hudsucker Proxy*, as the address of a toy store. Likewise, with all the crucifixion symbolism and “Jesus” epithets surrounding Barton, he might as well have a “Jesus” name tag embroidered on his clothes. But since that might be a bit much, at least in real time, the sight of John Turturro with a “Jesus” name tag on his jumpsuit is postponed until *The Big Lebowski*. (See the motto for the *Howards End* essay.) Additionally, note how this latter character uses the name in the third person when referring to himself and the fact he pronounces it JEE-zus rather than hay-SOOS, in spite of his Latino surname and accent, further reducing the ambiguity for an English speaking audience. In *Burn After Reading*, moments after John Malkovich’s Osbourne Cox invokes crucifixion both verbally and with an arm gesture, he and his

wife make multiple references not to cheese but to *cheeses*, which approximates Jesus. *The Hudsucker Proxy* also features the works of Tolstoy, an author with great respect for the common man, which Barton claims to have. And while on the subject, featuring the city of *Brainern* in *Fargo* could be taken as a remote example of a “head” reference.

Charlie is revealed indicating his head. His first words, “Did you . . .,” recall the distinction made by Woody Allen’s Alvy Singer in *Annie Hall*: “‘Jew.’ Not ‘Did you.’” He repeats these words later. Charlie intimidates Barton into cautious diplomatic metanoia, the dice on Charlie’s suspenders hinting at the chances taken when dealing with strangers. Fittingly, Charlie apologizes “like hell.” His last name is Meadows, like the Elysian Fields or happy hunting grounds. Barton declines to shake his hand, but Charlie offers Wild Turkey Kentucky straight bourbon whiskey, the propriety of which will be suggested below.

Charlie’s expression “just a nip” anticipates Lipnick’s ethnic slur on the Japanese and also obliquely foreshadows Audrey’s death, as it recalls Frida Kahlo’s 1935 painting *UNOS CUANTOS PIQUETITOS!* (A Few Small Nips!), which shows a man standing next to a bloody bed on which lies a woman whom he has killed. (The Spanish title as it appears on the painting does not begin with an inverted exclamation point.) In Kahlo’s painting, the victim’s bloody palm is displayed, as Barton’s later will be. The floor in the painting is a yellowish-green color not unlike that of Barton’s wallpaper. In her biography of Frida Kahlo, Hayden Herrera writes of the artist’s work, “in several self-portraits a yellow olive accentuates a feeling of claustrophobic oppression.” Herrera quotes Kahlo’s diary as saying, “Yellow: madness, sickness, fear. . . . Greenish yellow: more madness and mystery.”

Apologizing, Charlie says, “I sure do forget myself sometimes.” Bill will later make the converse complaint. In accord with the numerous “head” references, Charlie repeats, “I’d imagine.” He sells “peace of mind” via the “human contact” that Barton cannot abide. Interestingly, in the film *Vertigo*, Judy, whose last name is Barton, lives in a hotel with a name that begins with an *E*, and writes a letter that includes the phrase “peace of mind.” “Fire, theft and casualty are not things that only happen to other people—that’s what I tell ’em,” says Charlie, and he will see to it. He first addresses Barton as “neighbor,” but now promotes him to “brother.” Charlie repeats the word *heel*, which is ironically antithetical to the abundant references to the head. He also uses the word *venue*, which recurs in *The Big Lebowski*.

For his part, Barton anticipates the forthcoming deaths by using the word *stiff*. His talk of “new theater” recalls the quotation of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* in Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* referring to Daedalus being trapped in the labyrinth and turning his mind to unknown arts (*et ignotas animus dimittit in artes*). Barton speaks of looking “at ourselves up there,” possibly implying a divine aspect to humanity. He also considers Charlie “a real man,” which recalls certain controversies within Christianity, such the Arian heresy, that revolve around whether Jesus was true man and/or true god. Charlie then says, “Christ,” almost as if in the second person. Such is the case several times in this film. In the transcendent realm of the Hotel Earle, the secular is inconspicuous, so Charlie admits that “you forget there’s other people *in the world*.” As when he entered, Charlie indicates his head as he exits.

Immediately subsequent to Charlie’s visit, Barton’s wallpaper begins to peel. Barton has just spoken of those who “insulate themselves from the common man,” and has himself demonstrated this by refusing to shake Charlie’s hand. Now, dealing with the delamination of his room’s insulating veneer, Barton has the unpleasant experience of getting what the screenplay calls “tacky yellow wall sweat.” on his hand. Also, in keeping with the general atmosphere of the

hotel, the screenplay describes the sagging wallpaper as glistening “yellow, like a fleshy tropical flower.

Barton hears a mosquito and continues a tradition among characters in the Coen brothers’ films, such as Florence Arizona, of looking up with open mouths in an attitude that recalls the story of turkeys thus drowning in the rain as told by Kris Kristofferson’s David in *Alice Doesn’t Live Here Anymore*. This “drowning turkey posture” is a very consistent part of the Coens’ proprietary ideolect.

After referring to “any king” in the previous scene, Barton now finds himself in Ben Geisler’s office with a picture of a king behind him. The secretary exemplifies the kinesics of improper art, typing at a pace that contrasts ironically with that of Barton’s work. Above her hangs a picture of what could be the Sahara desert, which Charlie will later mention.

Geisler enters and corrects the pronunciation of his name, which, appropriately for this driven, type-A man, may be derived from the German word for “whip.” The confusion about his name highlights the superficiality of labels and the fluidity of identity, which will be investigated in several subsequent essays. Also, in his review of the book *Errol Flynn: Satan’s Angel* by David Bret, Lincoln D. Hurst, Ph.D., writes, “The name of Flynn’s trial lawyer Jerry Giesler is misspelled ‘Geisler’ 32 times.”

Geisler mentions “Norman Steele,” which sounds like a reference to the weaponry that helped conquer England in 1066 and against which Errol Flynn’s Robin Hood fights in *The Adventures of Robin Hood*. He says that Indians are always needed for Westerns, perhaps suggesting that the West is in need of the Eastern wisdom of India’s gurus. Lou’s last name (Breeze) is another suggestion of *spiritus*, like the breeze that rushes past Barton’s door. As is said of the kingdom in Luke 17:21 and in the apocryphal Thomas Gospel, it is, respectively, in him or all around him, if he will but see it. Geisler’s expression “kiss my dimpled ass” paraphrases a line in *Ulysses*, with “dimpled” here replacing “royal Irish.”

Barton gets a taste of home in the New York Cafe. Chapter 8 of *Ulysses* features the Burton restaurant, disgusting culinary imagery and the Davy Byrnes pub, which is on Duke street. A character named Duke will be introduced later in this film. Geisler contradicts Lipnick by assuring Barton that his assignment will result in “a B picture.” “Jesus, throw a rock,” says Geisler. This statement includes the name of the one who supposedly did not sin as well as something like a command to cast the first stone, which is a task for him who is without sin.

In the restroom, the theme of purgation is represented by urination and vomiting. Bill Mayhew kneels on his handkerchief as if it were a prayer rug before a porcelain shrine. His last name recalls Henry Mayhew, the English journalist and sociologist of the nineteenth century. He is already humming *Old Black Joe*, announcing he is from the South. Bill is said to be modeled on William Faulkner, who was from Mississippi and was a great admirer of James Joyce. Echoes of the works of Faulkner have already occurred. His 1927 novel *Mosquitoes* corresponds with the pest in Barton’s room. Faulkner’s 1929 novel *The Sound and the Fury* has a character named Benjy. Both the name and the title might apply to Ben Geisler. There will also be echoes of his novels *As I Lay Dying* and *The Hamlet*. The idea of purgation is perpetuated by the excessive hand washing.

Barton says, “Jesus. W. P.!” as if introducing himself as Jesus to Bill. Barton calls him “the finest novelist of our time.” Many, including Joseph Campbell and Thomas Mann, considered James Joyce to have been the greatest novelist of the twentieth century. Faulkner used

the devices of stream of consciousness and interior monologue that were pioneered by Joyce. Describing Hollywood as “the great salt lick” recalls Faulkner’s 1931 short story *Idyll in the Desert*. (A discussion of the symbolic significance of salt will be postponed until a later essay.) Alfred Kazin wrote of William Faulkner’s “inability to choose between Dostoevsky and Hollywood Boulevard.” Barton recalls the last line from his play when he says, “it’s a little early.” In one sense, the mild-mannered Barton is far from “imposing.” He asks if Bill has ever written a wrestling picture. Faulkner did uncredited work on the 1932 film *Flesh*, in which Wallace Beery plays a man named Polakai who becomes the wrestling champion of Germany. Having just reported being blocked up, Barton is now “drippin’,” not just with water but with incontinent veneration. He is eager to assign Bill the role of mentor, but should watch out for those feet of clay. For his part, Bill should speak with caution about taking his “stab.”

Barton arrives at Writers’ Building 11-14 and it is revealed that the film to which Bill is assigned is called *Slave Ship*. In Romans 11:14, St. Paul says, “If by any means I may provoke to emulation them which are my flesh, and might save some of them.” Barton meets Audrey Taylor, whose clothes are well *tailored* and who has helped *fashion* some of Bill’s books. She also recalls Andy Taylor as well as Odets’s plays *The Country Girl* (1950) and *The Flowering Peach* (1954). Her hand on Barton’s shoulder causes him to react typically. In spite of this, he asks for a date, indicating that he may be making progress. Audrey’s injunction not to judge is consistent with Matt 7:1 and with that verse taken implicitly by Joseph Campbell to be the motto of *Finnegans Wake*: Romans 11:32.

The thumbtacks provided by CHET! are one of several crucifixion motifs and are a comical, diminutive echo of the nails in chapter 6 of *Ulysses*. It is in that chapter of Joyce’s novel that a joke is told in which a man says of a statue of Jesus, “That’s not Mulcahy.” The Christ symbolism associated with Barton works in opposition to this joke about the failure to appreciate consubstantiality. The thumbtacks also recall Bloom’s rubber band and Odysseus being bound to the mast.

Barton is clinging to his ego and persona. This is externalized as he works to repair the wallpaper and thus maintain the façade that it furnishes. His disgust with the slime now becomes associated with sex as he hears the “love-birds” through the wall. He tries to escape into his art, but is interrupted by Charlie, who has put cotton in his ear, as will Barton later. Even if Charlie cannot trade *his* head, he will demonstrate that this may not be true for others. His tie connotes castration anxiety. Barton is not married, but does not say whether he ever was. Clifford Odets was married to Luise Rainer from 1937 to 1940.

As the screenplay indicates, Charlie “taps himself on the head.” The essay on *Heavenly Creatures* will expound on the Joycean significance of such an act. His reference to “me, myself, and I” could suggest multiple personality disorder. He speaks of a customer “carrying fire and life,” in accord with the Upanishads’ teaching of the body’s internal analogue of the sacrificial fire. Barton alludes to “the drill” and then comments on his introspective task to “plumb the depths” and “dredge up something from inside.”

Charlie expresses partiality for Jack Oakie, whose films include *The Toast of New York* (1937) and *Rise and Shine* (1941). Correspondingly, Garland has told Barton, “You’re the toast of Broadway,” and Odets wrote a play called *Awake and Sing!* (1935), and, as noted above, Barton’s play ends with allusions to being awake and to a choir. Incidentally, Clifford Odets and

Jack Oakie are interred in the same cemetery: Forest Lawn, Glendale, California. Charlie's word "pip" appropriately suggests *Great Expectations*, since Lipnick is "expecting great things."

Having just finished discussing relationships with women, Barton says, "I'm not that interested in the act itself." The status of Barton's relationship to Charlie continues to transform as Barton is alternatively addressed as "neighbor," "friend" and "compadre." When they next meet, Charlie will again call him "brother." By wrestling with Charlie, Barton may be metaphorically wrestling with his shadow, which can be a source of inspiration and creativity (see the essay on *Heavenly Creatures* for a more detailed discussion of psychology). After wrestling, Charlie says, "Jesus, I did hurt you!" Again, the ambiguous construction, which occurs frequently in this film, allows for the inference that the name is being used in the second person rather than as an expletive.

Bill's novel is titled *NEBUCHADNEZZAR*, a biblical title reminiscent of Faulkner's 1936 novel *Absalom, Absalom!* The title should resonate with Barton, as it recalls Hebrews in exile. The book is published by Pappas and Swain. The Coen brothers being well known for autobiographical elements in their films, and recalling that Ethan studied philosophy at Princeton, this may be confidently inferred to be a glancing reference to *Knowledge and Justification*, edited by George Sotiros Pappas and Marshall Swain, Cornell University Press, 1978. What colophonic symbology might be inferred from the publisher's emblem will be left to others to ascertain.

After the group is discovered in Griffith Park just north of the road leading to the observatory, a motif arises that will factor into several of these essays. Charlie has already confessed, "I sure do forget myself sometimes." Bill now complains, "It's when I . . . can't escape m'self, that I want to rip m'head off and run screamin' down the street with m'balls in a fruitpicker's pail." Writing *myself* as *m'self*, as the screenplay does, isolates *self*, as if to say "my self."

The loss of the self, or self-transcendence, is a fundamental concept of mysticism. Personal annihilation is a prerequisite for mystical experience and spiritual emancipation. Breaking the bonds of ego and culture is also what happens when one identifies with another. Compassion is the recognition of the self in the other, of the subject in the object. Barton is having trouble recognizing himself in "the common man," like CHET! or Charlie.

In the West, clinging to the self is pride, the fundamental sin. In the East, the self is considered illusory, the goal being to transcend it and merge with the divine. Just as the drop merges with the sea and becomes sea, the soul merges with and becomes God. The self is the source of the rebirth impulse, which traps one in the cycle of reincarnation. Buddhism recognizes no underlying personal identity or unalterable ego. The great delight (*mahasukha*) is experienced when it is realized that everything is impermanent and without a self (*anatman*).

Wishes should be made carefully, as with Bill's suggestion of decapitation, not to mention castration. Bill drinks whiskey, which is, in Gaelic, the "water of life" and that which resurrects Finnegan. Bill's brand may be another inside joke. Given the "drowning turkey posture" (among other repeated tropes) typically found in the films of the Coen brothers, perhaps Bill should drink Wild Turkey, as does Charlie. There also exists a Barton QT whiskey. Bill mentions the story of Solomon's mammy. Solomon's mother was Bathsheba, his father was David, and one of his brothers was Absalom, providing an even more explicit link to Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* A rhyme is secured when Bill urinates, as someone does in both of his scenes. Subsequent essays will explore the use of formal rhyme as a structural device.

“Empathy requires understanding,” counsels Audrey. Compassion requires proper initiation, which Barton has still not achieved. “What? What don’t I understand?” asks Barton, who is still a victim of that ignorance of reality the Buddhists call *avidya*. He is operating on the level of the lower three *cakras*, which results in desire and fear. The essay on *The Crying Game* will offer more positive assessment of naïveté.

Back in Barton’s room, a pattern of light on the ceiling recalls one seen by Bloom near the end of chapter 17 in *Ulysses*. The streamers on the fan are still limp. Barton is uncomfortable when he finds himself literally in another man’s shoes. In chapter 3 of *Ulysses*, Stephen Dedalus says, “My feet are in his boots at the end of his legs.” He manages only to type, “A large man in tights,” which is Charlie’s cue to enter with Barton’s shoes, which would be tight on Charlie, just as Charlie’s have proved to be loose on Barton.

The phrase “cross to bear” denotes crucifixion, while “a little lift” could apply to crucifixion or resurrection, and even portends Charlie’s consequential emergence from the elevator near the end. Charlie asks about “the life of the mind.” This is the title of the last major work of Hannah Arendt, in which she contemplates the nature of evil. It was published posthumously in 1978, the same year as the Pappas and Swain book mentioned above. Barton says, “Maybe I only had one idea in me – my play.” In a positive sense, this could reflect a kind of universality, what Stephen calls “the word known to all men” in *Ulysses*.

When discussing the “love-birds,” Charlie admits to seeking “a piece of that.” Though initially taken to be a posterior reference, its ambiguity allows for an anterior interpretation consistent with the homophonic “peace of mind” that he offers to his customers. Charlie tells Barton, “You got a head on your shoulders.” This is true, but is not to be taken for granted. Charlie must “pull up stakes,” again suggesting crucifixion, if not vampirism. He must leave in order to fix problems, not at the *main* office nor the *central* office, but at the “*head* office.” A slight change in the punctuation of Charlie’s assurance yields: “Mark. My words.” This is like a claim of authorship of the Gospel according to Mark or an indication of where the words of Christ may be found. With oracular ambiguity, Charlie tells Barton that his picture will be, not completed, but “finished.”

The streamers on Barton’s fan are now elevated, having hung limp just moments earlier. Charlie’s presence seems to have made the difference. The last time Charlie was in Barton’s room, the streamers were limp because the fan was not running. In this scene, it runs continuously.

The screenplay gives Barton’s family the same names as in his play: Morris and Lillian Fink, and Uncle Dave. The men’s names are changed in the film. Barton’s father is now Sam. This makes Barton Sam’s son, which sounds like Samson, another character with noteworthy hair. Also, the title “Son of Sam” is associated with the series of 1977 murders by David Berkowitz.

Barton observes that “the heat is sweating off the wallpaper,” as he himself is in a sense sweating it out in a manner not unlike the ritual sweat bath initiations of American Indians. Charlie, as he will again later, refers to the hotel as “a dump.” He also indicates his head yet again. The thuds from above are like those made by CHET! from below just prior to his first entrance. The camera focuses on the intervening, obscuring surface of the ceiling in the same way that the Hindu concept of *maya* restricts perception to the natural, phenomenal world.

As Ben Geisler enters his outer office, he says to his companion, “You’re dead. You’re a corpse.” In the East, a monk wears a saffron robe in imitation of a burial shroud to symbolize that he is dead to the world. Like CHET!, Geisler pronounces “Los Angeles” with a hard *g*. Barton’s hotel is decorated to look like a swamp, but Geisler says of the city, “This is a desert,” suggesting both the wasteland problem and the convention of prophets encountering God in the wilderness. As mentioned above, the Gospel according to Thomas asserts that the kingdom is spread upon the earth and men do not see it. Whether or not a swamp is visible, the lake of bliss, *sukhavati*, is right there waiting to be realized.

Hamlet and *Ruggles of Red Gap* are ironically mentioned in the same breath by Ben, who then reports that Jack has “taken a interest.” Coincidentally, while discussing the novels of James Joyce in *Wings of Art*, Joseph Campbell says, “a anthology,” “a Irish monument,” and “a equivalent.” Ben refers to their project as a “turkey,” recalling Charlie’s drink and the name assigned in this essay to Barton’s occasional posture. Geisler exclaims, “Fat ass son of a bitch,” providing the Coen brothers with one of their many opportunities for tributary self-theft. As a souvenir, Tony Shalhoub himself will repeat this line verbatim a decade later as Freddy Riedenschneider in *The Man who wasn’t There*.

One’s interpretive efforts are sometimes met halfway, as when a pun on a relevant psychoanalytic term is shouted in one’s face. Obliging, Geisler directs his phone call with the demand, “Projection!” Projection is the externalization and transference to others of repressed unconscious characteristics. Barton’s excessive emotional responses, such as to CHET! and to Audrey’s touch, indicate reaction not to the other, but to a rejected part of himself projected onto the other. Projection is the easy way out. The goal is to accept the unacknowledged, dangerous aspect of the psyche, which constitutes what Carl Jung calls the shadow, the most common projection of which is the devil. (The essay on *Heavenly Creatures* will address these matters more fully.) The forthcoming dailies may offer Barton such an opportunity to subordinate his ego in service to his total psyche.

Ben specifies Barton’s appointment with Lipnick as “Eight-fifteen tomorrow morning at Lipnick’s house.” The time and address are written on a piece of paper that is brandished as boldly as when Ben yells, “Projection!” The title of one of Odets’s plays, *910 Eden Street* (1931), consists of an address. Lipnick’s address is given as 829 Moraga, a location in the Sepulveda Pass over which the Getty Center now looms. The is also true if the time is interpreted as an address. Flaunted as it is, this may well be another inside joke, possibly even a biblical reference.

Consider, for example, the relevance of chapter 8, verse 15 of the following books: In Exodus, Pharaoh hardens his heart. Leviticus features sanctifying blood. Deuteronomy mentions, “terrible wilderness, wherein were fiery serpents, and scorpions, and drought.” In Joshua, “Israel . . . fled by way of the wilderness.” Ezekiel warns, “thou shalt see greater abominations than these.” Daniel involves the search for meaning, while the three succeeding verses feature the following: “Gabriel, make this man to understand the vision”; “I was afraid, and fell upon my face”; “I was in a deep sleep.” In Luke, Jesus says that those who hear and keep the word “bring forth fruit with patience.” In John, Jesus declares, “I judge no man.” In Romans, Paul speaks of “the spirit of bondage.” With respect to chapter 8, verse 29: In Exodus, Moses says that he “will entreat the Lord that the swarms of flies may depart.” In I Kings, Solomon does something so that God’s “eyes may be open.” Proverbs mentions the sea. In Luke, a man “was kept bound with chains and fetters.”

Ben, who has just sarcastically said, “You thought!” now asks for “Ideas, Broad strokes.” These ideas will be provided by Audrey, a “broad” who will stroke Barton. As if to express crucifixion anxiety, Ben adds, “Don’t cross me, Fink.”

In the screening room, the dailies are in black and white, and thus somewhat abstract and removed from normal physical reality. Like the three young men in the Martello tower at the start of *Ulysses*, Barton is operating in an isolated realm removed from the world. This is emphasized by the fact that the clipboard shows a date of 12/9/41, but nobody has mentioned the outbreak of war.

The clapper shouts, “Devil on the Canvas, twelve apple, take one.” (This line was changed from “twelve baker” in the published screenplay.) Twelve is the number of apostles and zodiacal signs. The film’s title suggests a painting. One form that the devil may take in a painting is that of the serpent in the garden of Eden who tempted Eve with an “apple,” inviting her to “take one.” Barton is being tempted with material success, but is horrified.

The director calls, “Action,” the translation of the Sanskrit word *karma*, which can be considered either the fundamental problem to be overcome or divine justice. This latter concept is explicitly cited in *The Hudsucker Proxy*. *The Tibetan Book of the Dead (Bardo Thodol)* teaches that people who die while still clinging to their ego will be set upon by deities who come to liberate but who appear terrifying and will tear the person to pieces. Thus the unprepared Barton hears, “I will destroy him!” in the same third person language used by Lipnick when he says, “Let me at him. Let me put my arms around this guy.” This also anticipates Lipnick’s later attempt to destroy Barton.

The screenplay says that the wrestler affects a German accent, which would associate him with Beery’s German wrestler mentioned above. Charlie, having already associated himself with wrestling, will later associate himself with Germany. The director’s call of “Cut! Cut! Cut!” on “take four” sounds like “God! God! God!” This divine trinity will be echoed by the reunited triplets in *The Hudsucker Proxy*. Barton’s wrestling lesson with Charlie is recalled by the take designated “twelve charlie.” Barton remains motionless, but this is not aesthetic arrest. His fear and revulsion make this an improper aesthetic experience in which he demonizes and rejects his own shadow via projection, in both the psychological and cinematic sense.

Barton continues to struggle with his dilemma involving orphan and dame. He need not look far for concrete examples. Charlie says of his parents, “Mine have passed on.” Barton will seem to have lost his at the end. The orphan is also one of the names of the philosopher’s stone (see the essay on *Like Water for Chocolate*). As for dames, Barton encounters three significant and three insignificant female figures. Two of each set have already appeared, the significant ones being Calypso and Audrey, the insignificant ones being Poppy and Geisler’s secretary. Still awaiting him are a dance partner and a beautiful stranger at the very end.

This film has been characterized as a meditation on the inability to create. Richard Linklater’s *Slacker* features a conversation in a coffee shop on a similar topic. For the artist, loss of creativity is death. A particularly extreme example of this will be discussed in the essay on *Heavenly Creatures*. The resemblance of *Barton Fink* to *The Shining*, in which another writer is virtually alone in a hotel and suffering writer’s block, is well known. Also linking this film to *The Shining* are the Kubrickesque shots of the hotel hallway.

Barton Fink emerged from the Coens’ struggles to finish their screenplay for *Miller’s Crossing*, a title that, like Ben’s demand the Barton not “cross” him, may involve a pun implying

either betrayal or crucifixion. The Barton Arms, which also features an address in the 620s, is a hotel (or apartment building) featured in *Miller's Crossing*, and another of that name is also referred to in Atom Egoyan's *Felicia's Journey*. There is also a Barton Park and Cottage in *Sense and Sensibility*. While on the topic of other films, Barton's hair calls to mind *Eraserhead*, and he sometimes whimpers like Ben in *The Graduate*.

The streamers are again lifted by Barton's fan, perhaps because inspiration, in the person of Audrey, is on the way. The phone number SL6-4304 is yet another opportunity for an inside joke. As Siegfried looks to Brünnhilde to give him back his courage, so Barton recruits Audrey as his muse. She has already been feeding him aphorisms such as "Empathy requires understanding." Mythologically, the male becomes dominant only after being activated by the female, and the goddess initiates the hero by guiding him through tests and trials. Ensuing essays will expand on these themes.

Barton in bed with his glasses above the pillow but his head beneath it recalls some of the paintings of Rene Magritte, like *The Heart of the Matter* and *The Lovers*. This defensive ostrich posture is the opposite of the "drowning turkey." When Audrey arrives, her hat, dress and gloves are green, like Barton's wallpaper. Barton refers to "three acts." The second act of this film could be defined by Audrey's presence. Characterizing Bill's efforts as "simple morality tales," Audrey describes some structural genre strategies and conventions. She says that some of Bill's "scripts were so . . . spirited," inspiration (*spiritus*) being exactly what Barton needs. Nevertheless, she advises that he need not type his "soul into it." As the Hotel Earle often seems to manifest a temporally transcendent eternity, Audrey fittingly claims that their task "won't take any time at all." This also anticipates *The Hudsucker Proxy*, in which time occasionally stands still and the company motto is "The Future is Now." Lillian Hellman defined the Renaissance man as the man who wants to know. Inquiring about Audrey's contributions to Bill's work, Barton says, "I want to know." Audrey refers to "the last couple," Adam and Eve being the first. She shows by her facial expression that she realizes Barton doth protest too much, counseling him, "Don't judge him, Barton."

Audrey becomes Barton's muse in the form of a pillow dictionary (a tutor who works in bed). Barton joins Audrey in bed, as Odysseus joins Circe, though one of his feet remains on the floor until out of frame. As an obvious sexual metaphor, the depths are then literally plumbed, as the plumbing is explored to the sounds of the wrestlers in the dailies. These sounds end when Barton opens his eyes the morning after. The mosquito is seen for the first time and it repeats Barton's sex act with Audrey in miniature. Audrey has been killed without waking Barton, having said that she would try to "slip away." Audrey's name now also recalls *Little Shop of Horrors*. Barton's triple scream recalls Christ's reference to the cock crowing three times (Matt 26:34, Mark 14:30) and also recalls the screams in *The Godfather* made in response to awakening to the bloody head of a horse in one's bed.

The period of time from when Audrey is found dead to when Barton walks next door and consults with Charlie marks the boundary between segments of the film related to each other by the golden ratio, which will be explained in the essay on *Heavenly Creatures*. Charlie comes to investigate Barton's screams. In response to Charlie's queries, Barton ambivalently nods as he says, "No . . . no." CHET!'s uniform and the bell on his shoe cart echo those of the pageboy, while Charlie's vomiting echoes Bill's.

Charlie's exclamation could almost be punctuated as "Jesus/Barton," and Barton now fittingly associates himself with the stigmata of Christ. Having received his stigma when he swatted the mosquito, Barton displays his bloody palm. To ensure that it will not go unnoticed,

he holds his hand near his face. Even if its foreshadowing by the thumbtacks was unintentional, the Coens would not be so anxious to draw attention to this now if they themselves did not attach some importance to it. Stigmata imagery is also employed in the Coens' earlier film *Blood Simple* and in their later film *Fargo* ("a defensive wound"). There, photographs are altered to give the appearance of bleeding wrists, and the hand of M. Emmett Walsh's Loren Visser, private detective, is "nailed" to a window sill. Similar explicit stigmatic imagery in *A Very Long Engagement*, in which several men suffer unilateral hand wounds, is foreshadowed by the half-crucifix in the opening shot of that film. The death and resurrection symbolized by crucifixion may refer, respectively, to the ego and the creativity of the unconscious. Thus, this may bode well for the stigmatized Barton's writing.

Charlie says, "Wake up, friend!" As noted above, this is a solicitation to imitate the Buddha. Barton, however, has devolved from "brother." "Did you . . .," says Charlie, repeating his first words in the film. He then continues, "Barton, between you and me, did you have sexual intercourse?" The phrase "between you and me" ostensibly implies the maintenance of secrecy. As to the sex itself, Barton will later deny any between himself and Charlie, but will concede, "We wrestled." Charlie again indicates his head by assuming the same pose as that of his first entrance and again uses the word *Jesus* in the consistent with the second person. Barton then invokes "mercy," the concept incarnated by Jesus. "You're in pictures," declares Charlie, which contrasts with the final words of the film. He then reminds the stigmatic Barton of the prospect of stigma in the sense of scandal and disgrace that could "ruin" him.

"Put this totally out of your head," advises Charlie. Though a later essay will identify such behavior as the crucial error in *Heavenly Creatures*, Charlie's instruction could also be taken as recognition that mysticism is not a rational, intellectual problem. In that context, mind is the problem, not the solution. This is the lesson in the story told by Joseph Campbell in *Transformations of Myth Through Time* in which a student asks his guru, "Am I in possession of Buddha consciousness?" Acknowledging that even rocks do, but explaining that the question itself indicates that the student has misconstrued the issue as a logical problem, the guru says, "No."

As Barton arrives at Lipnick's home, note the green pool cover. Lipnick's yard shares the tropicity of the Hotel Earle's lobby. Yet another barking dog is heard. The screenplay says Barton's eyes are closed to slits against the sun, again anticipating Lipnick's later aspersion cast in the direction of the Japanese. Los Angeles is showing no sign of what William Faulkner called its "treacherous unbrightness." Like Semele, Barton is not ready to handle the divine radiance. Whiskey is brought to him on a silver platter, recalling the manner in which the head of John the Baptist is presented to Salome. He speaks of "work in progress," which was the title under which Joyce published early extracts of *Finnegans Wake*. Lipnick repeats Charlie's words when he tells Barton, "I want you to put it out of your head." Lipnick's apology recalls the kissing of Christ's feet in Luke 7:38.

Though sometimes easier said than done, the departing Charlie advises, "We gotta keep our heads." The "personal stuff" that Barton is asked to keep is perhaps that which he calls "the stuff of life," which is also what Charlie seems to be inviting Barton to put into his play when he says, "Make me your wrestler." Barton has rebounded to the status of "compadre." It is difficult not to think of *The Terminator* as Charlie says, "I'll be back." Barton now cries and makes noise that is evidently audible outside his room, as Charlie did earlier. The other residents, whose

presence is indicated by the periodic appearance of their shoes in the hallway, could also presumably be heard were they to make such sounds.

As a dog barks in the background and with his fan turned off, Barton opens the Bible to the second chapter of the book of Daniel and the dream of Nebuchadnezzar, foreshadowed by Bill's novel. The passage does not merely sanction the interpretation of dreams but demands it under threat of dismemberment. This interpretive imperative may be a literal threat, given that Barton's friends are being cut into pieces behind the scenes. This is also the fate of Buddhists who die still clinging to their ego.

Shifting his attention to Genesis 1:1-2, Barton seems to be taking to heart Ben Geisler's call for "Projection!" as he observes in the Bible the open lines of his own script. Barton feared having only one story in him, but that story may just be one that is universal and common to all of humanity, whether it be transmitted by way of a play, a movie or sacred text. He does not answer the phone in the finished film. In the screenplay, the call is from CHET! telling Barton that the police are downstairs.

The fan in the elevator was considered important enough to mention in the screenplay. It is surrounded by a metal cage with circular elements that anticipate the central symbol in *The Hudsucker Proxy*. Four radial spokes divide the fan's cage into quadrants. It is thus analogous with all tetrads, such as the four gospels. This is also the structure of the archetypal paradise garden. The radially divided circle suggests a mandala, which represents ordered, integrated impulses. Jung describes quadripartite psychological structures (ego, self, shadow and soul image) and psychological functions (thinking, feeling, intuition, sensation). Giambattista Vico's *Scienza Nuova* presents history as a quartered circle. The four Viconian phases in this cyclical theory of history are the theocratic age of the establishment of civilization, the aristocratic age, the democratic age, and a period of renewal called the *ricorso*.

One of the cage's circular metal strips is broken. Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* is written in the form of a quartered circle that is broken in midsentence. The Buddha in the teaching posture forms a circle with his fingers but points to the break, indicating the goal of escape from the endless cycle of reincarnation. (This condition of final release is known as *moksha* in Sanskrit.)

Barton next encounters detectives Mastrionotti and Deutsch. The former name is Italian and the latter *means* German. Together, they represent two of the axis powers of World War II, the third to be referred to later. As demonstrated earlier, war has already been declared by this time.

"A week, eight, nine days-," responds Barton when asked how long he has resided in the hotel. He is asked, "Is this multiple choice?" (which, interpretively, it is) and goes on to specify, "Nine days-Tuesday-" in the published screenplay. The number *nine* has such associations as the nine muses, nine worthies, the nine lives of cats, and the phrase "nine days wonder." In *Ulysses*, it is after nine days that the body of a drowned man is expected to resurface, symbolizing resurrection. It is supposedly after nine days that puppies open their eyes. Barton's play includes the line, "Well, my eyes are open now," which could have been spoken by the Buddha and is spoken by Guttrune in Wagner's *Götterdämmerung*. Wotan (Odin) crucifies himself for nine days on the world ash tree to gain wisdom and later begets nine Valkyrie daughters. Though it is often said that Barton is in hell, sufficient time has now been allotted for travel to an even deeper destination. A falling millstone is said to take nine days to reach the bottom of Tartarus, the place below Hades. Nine is also the sum of the digits in Barton's room number. (Similarly, look for a

hotel room numbered 2421 in *Splendor in the Grass*. Nine is also Benjamin Braddock's room number during his stay in Berkeley in *The Graduate*, as well as an important address in *Gaslight*.) Many numbers with this property are of great spiritual significance, as will be discussed in the essay on *Whale Rider*.

Charlie's real name is Karl Mundt and his home is the Hotel Earle. Consider the following from the 1975 *Britannica Book of the Year*:

Mundt, Karl Earl, U.S. politician (b. Humboldt, S.D., June 3, 1900 – d. Washington, D.C., Aug. 16, 1974), entered Congress in 1939 as a Republican from South Dakota, then moved into the Senate in 1949. After World War II he gained national prominence as acting chairman of the House Committee on Un-American Activities, which was involved in the Alger Hiss case and in the Joseph McCarthy hearings. He published countless articles and never hesitated to air his strong anti-Communist views, his concern for conservation, and his support for UNESCO, which he helped to create. Though incapacitated by a stroke in November 1969, he refused to resign. The Senate finally broke a long-standing precedent in February 1972 when it stripped him of responsibilities that had fallen to him by right of seniority. The following November he ran for reelection but was defeated.

(See also www.departments.dsu.edu/library/archive/karl.html.)

Clifford Odets was labeled a Communist by the aforementioned committee and blacklisted. Thus, it is apparently for Odets's Nemesis that Charlie is named. While on this topic, a man named Martin Fink was involved in the production of films such as *In Like Flint* and *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*.

Charlie is nicknamed "Madman Mundt," and it was in this year of 1941 that Earl "Madman" Muntz began selling cars in neighboring Glendale, California. Charlie's decapitations recall Odets's 1949 play *The Big Knife*. One of the victims described is presumably the doctor whom Charlie saw about his ear infection. The ultimate result of their argument is revealed, and the doctor's area of specialization recalls the "eye, ear, nose and throat witness" in *Finnegans Wake*. Barton says, "I'm trying to think. . . . Nothing, really." In Jungian terms, he is struggling against "that Barton Fink feeling."

Returning to his room, Barton reconsiders Charlie's box, again adopting the "drowning turkey" posture before resuming his typing. "Barton holds it up to his ear and listens," says the screenplay, "as if it were a seashell and he is listening for the surf." Alas, he seems not to want to hear anything new. Borrowing behavior from Charlie, Barton puts cotton in his ears. Recalled are Odets's play *The Silent Partner* (1936-9, depending on source) and radio play *The Show Must Go On* (1939).

After being lost in the dream realm, Odysseus finally returns to where he started. Barton returns to his play, resisting development to a new stage. Purgatory and reincarnation offer the opportunity to relive those experiences by which one should have been illuminated. By returning to his play, Barton has another chance to find the wisdom that he needs.

In *Transformations of Myth Through Time*, Joseph Campbell alludes to the self-portrait by Arnold Böcklin (1827-1901) that includes a skeleton with a violin. According to Campbell, by playing to the artist, death becomes "the vehicle of the voice of the muse." Calypso may now be a channel through which the dead Audrey can inspire Barton. These two female figures may represent different aspects of Barton's anima, his inner feminine creativity. As Goethe declares, it

is the eternal feminine that leads us forward (“das Ewigweibliche zieht uns hinan”). The theme of the activation of males by a female power, cited earlier, will be further developed when other films are considered in subsequent essays.

The decapitated Audrey is reminiscent of the goddess Kali, who, after acting as guide and mentor, cuts off her own head to liberate the disciple from her influence. Audrey has liberated or unblocked Barton both sexually and in terms of industry, if not genuine creativity. Also recalled is the ancient vulture goddess who consumes headless bodies to facilitate rebirth. Decapitation is central to the story of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Gawain also being the name of a minor character in the Coen brothers’ *The Ladykillers*. Audrey’s severed head also echoes the “spherical object a-restin’ in the highway” in the Coens’ *Raising Arizona*.

Ignoring the Biblical command to interpret or die, Barton does not open the package, thus ironically restricting himself to “thinking outside the box.” His script is typed on LITHOPAQUE paper. If this implies metaphysical opacity, then it is not the proper medium by which to experience transcendent radiance. Despite describing his work as “big” to Garland, it promises little originality. The “postcard” finale is recognized as deriving from Barton’s play, which he seems merely to rewrite due to a sort of separation anxiety, fixation on the old, and fear of failure. The cotton in his ears has rendered Barton deaf to the opportunity for inspiration by Audrey. His shower affords purgation, which, however, often also requires fire.

At the USO dance, it looks as though Barton is finally comfortable being in the company of the common man. He eventually comes to feel himself to be in the presence of “monsters,” but this is only the slightest foretaste of the climax, as per Ezekiel 8:15 cited above. Barton proclaims, “I create. I’m a creator.” By this time, he even has this on Lipnick’s authority. Similarly, in *The Egyptian Book of the Dead*, it is written, “I am the source from which the gods arise.” This is also related to “Projection!” However, pomposity usually conceals some inner doubt, and Barton’s apotheosis is premature.

In chapter 15 of *Ulysses*, Stephen Dedalus taps his brow and is then knocked down by a soldier. Barton points to and taps his head, as Charlie has done, and is then knocked down by a sailor, though the screenplay specifies an infantryman. Subsequent essays will continue to explore the themes of the artist being reviled and genius being considered a form of madness.

Barton appears to be guilty of the sin of hubris, which is typically committed by imitating deity, transgressing limits, insolence, irreverence, or assuming a mission for which one is not yet qualified. In classical drama, punishment comes not for good fortune but for arrogance. Fortunately, humility purges pride and wipes out ego. Narcissism is cured by symbolic death and descent into the unconscious. Barton’s deflationary treatment by the detectives and the servicemen constitutes a preliminary purgation preparatory to revelation.

The Viconian ricorso is typified by the return of the gigantic hero and a period of battling giants. In the following scene, Barton will say, “Charlie’s back.” In the current scene, Barton experiences *de-jà vou* as he sees pairs of men fall to the floor as in the wrestling dailies. Appropriately, then, the musicians are identified as the Tommy Corso Band.

In Italian, *corso* means “course” or “flow.” In *Finnegans Wake*, the river Liffey illustrates the flow of time. *Corso* denotes circulation or progress (as of a pilgrim or a rake, perhaps). The secondary meaning is “Corsican,” Napoleon being the most notorious example. Corso Donati was a political enemy of Dante. Gregory Corso was a Beat writer, one of whose works is titled *Herald of the Autochthonic Spirit*. His name appears on a poster in the beatnik bar in *The Hudsucker Proxy*. Philip Corso wrote the UFO book *Day After Roswell*. Johnny Depp plays

Dean Corso in *The Ninth Gate*. Cane Corso is a breed of dog. The goal of the mystic is to escape the endless succession of corsi and recorsi. Barton, however, recycles his play.

The assault on Stephen in *Ulysses* is associated symbolically with the end of the world. For instance, one of the prostitutes in that scene says that the world is ending soon. Another common symbol of the end of the world is the archangel Gabriel blowing his horn. Accordingly, here in the city of the angels, the scene ends with the camera tracking into the bell of a trumpet, as it did earlier down the drain in Barton's bathroom sink. It may be hoped that it is the coming of Barton's spiritual realization that is being heralded.

As Mastrionotti reads Barton's script and Deutsch stares at the bathing beauty (Calypso), Barton says, "Keep your filthy eyes off that." It is uncertain to which man he is speaking, but the statement would apply equally well to either. William Faulkner, the model for Barton's "finest novelist of our time" did not die in 1941, but James Joyce, Joseph Campbell's choice for the greatest novelist of the century, did. The newspaper given to Barton says that Bill's middle name is Preston and that he is a Pulitzer Prize winner, like Amy Archer in *The Hudsucker Proxy*. The label "bright boy" recalls Odets's 1937 play *Golden Boy*, suggests spiritual radiance and perhaps signals a transition from the Dionysian (Dionysus being associated with dismemberment and the dark side) to the Apollonian (Apollo being associated with the sun, healing and eternal life). The phrase "idea man" will recur in *The Hudsucker Proxy*. Barton, having earlier experienced aesthetic arrest, now experiences physical, constabulary arrest. Unlike that earlier form of arrest, the current one does not raise Barton above desire and loathing.

Deutsch's first name turns out to be Fred, like that of Frederick Barbarosa. Mastrionotti's first name is Duke. Together with his Italian surname, this links him with the doges of Venice and Genoa. Befitting a man named Deutsch, Fred pronounces "Mundt" in a more Germanic fashion than Duke and, in fact, more like the German word for "mouth." Deutsch solicits epiphany, saying, "Show yourself." But as with Semele, such things are not for amateurs who are not prepared to handle it. Perhaps as another inside joke, the threshold of the elevator is labeled "MANUF'D BY MEYBERG BROS. LOS ANGELES CAL." (A Meyberg company is known to have made lighting fixtures.)

Charlie's fire brings the story to the brink of magic realism, as if straining to counter the criticism about the Coens' films being "cold." The protagonist of Nathanael West's novel *The Day of the Locust* (1939) works on a film called *The Burning of Los Angeles*. (The novel also features a character named Homer Simpson.)

Fire is the transforming medium. Some of its attributes, including its alchemical significance, will be dealt with in subsequent essays. It is said that fire is an exorciser of demons and will consume evil on Judgement Day. The sacrificial fire is the mouth of the gods. Robert Donington says that fire can be "heat for the wicked, and light for the good." He defines the wicked as those who resist their life's purpose, and the good as those who allow life to blaze through them. He says that Siegfried, who "forged his manhood in the smith's fire," welcomes Brünnhilde's fire "as a beacon to light him on his way."

For Barton, this fire may represent not so much hell as purgatory, which, psychologically, involves extinguishing the flaming rage that results from frustrated desire. St. Thomas asserts that purification by fire is required for entry into paradise. Similarly, T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* is a call for renewal through purgation. This purgatorial aspect of Charlie's fire is foreshadowed by Bill's and Charlie's vomiting, Bill's and Barton's urination, the sweating of the humans and the sweating off of the wallpaper.

Barton's wallpaper does not start peeling until Charlie enters the plot. Barton recognizes him as the source of heat when he says, "Charlie's back, it's hot, he's back." Charlie is the source both of purifying, sanctifying, transforming fire and of the water of life in the form of whiskey. Barton initially dislikes the smell of Charlie's whiskey, but later requests whiskey at Lipnick's house, which may constitute progress and foster optimism. For Donington, fire is "the blazing energy of life," while water represents "the illimitable unconscious." The theme of purification by fire and water can be found in Mozart's *The Magic Flute*, Wagner's *Götterdämmerung* and Spielberg's *Always*.

Charlie can be thought of as giving the lion roar of the Buddha. With the opening of the unconscious, primordial power emerges and God Himself reveals his own shadow. As is written in Job 40:15, "Behold now behemoth." Charlie told Barton, "Make me your wrestler." In the published screenplay, the wrestler in the dailies "affects a German accent." Charlie thus echoes that other wrestler when he says, "Heil Hitler," Hitler being his contemporary model of the collective shadow.

Barton rewrites his play instead of creating something new. He does this with cotton in his ears. The muse cannot be heard if one is afraid to put one's head in the mouth of the lion. Handcuffed, Barton now has no choice. He must sit as did the Buddha at the immovable spot where the latter received illumination. The situation is mirrored in Charlie's tie, the design of which is a cross between Barton's wallpaper and flames. He explains, "It tears me up inside to think about what they're going through. How trapped they are. I understand it. I feel for 'em. So I try and help 'em out. Jesus. Yeah. Yeah." Being torn up inside could have psychological implications and corresponds to events described in *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, some of which will be recounted presently. "[W]hat they're going through" is their *corso*. The Jungian feeling function is offered to supplement Barton's life of the mind. Charlie claims sympathy with the "trapped" and acts as a facilitator to "help 'em out," as of the bondage of transmigration to the released state of *moksa*. "Jesus" is juxtaposed to these concepts as an epithet, as it is in Stephen's meditation on the beach at the start of chapter 3 of *Ulysses*, immediately followed by repeated affirmation.

Charlie claims that those whom he helps "out" are those who are "put . . . through hell," making his powers analogous to those of the Japanese deity Jizo Bosatsu, who can rescue souls from hell. Charlie confesses, "I wanna crawl right out of my skin." The snake is a nearly universal religious symbol because it sheds its skin to be born again.

Charlie tells Barton, "you don't listen!" Jung says, "People will do anything, no matter how absurd, in order to avoid facing their own souls." Reaction formation is the masking of an instinct by its opposite. Barton does much "spouting off" about the "common man" but lacks a sense of kinship or consubstantiality with his "fellow man" and is unable to connect with him in practice. Charlie routinely expresses such affinity when addressing Barton, even calling him "brother," while Bill calls Barton "son." Mystical, nongenealogical affinities will be further explored in subsequent essays.

Barton would also do well to recognize his shadow in Charlie, and to some extent in Bill as well. Robert Donington advises, "It is no use rejecting a part of our very selves which can only be modified in so far as we can get on terms with it." After Charlie denounces Barton's inattentiveness, the screenplay specifies, "A tacky yellow fluid is dripping from Charlie's left ear and running down his cheek." This fluid is explicitly similar to Barton's "tacky yellow wall sweat." Charlie exclaims that he is "dripping again," just as Barton was said to be by Bill in the restroom.

Charlie again calls the hotel a “dump.” This recalls Gehenna, a Greek word referring to the valley of Hinnom, where refuse was burned outside the walls of ancient Jerusalem. The word is used in the Bible to describe the unquenchable fire of hell. Charlie’s characterization thus has indirect infernal connotations, but is also consonant with the transforming fire of cremation, which will be encountered again in the essay on *Like Water for Chocolate*. Charlie calls Barton, “just a tourist with a typewriter,” just as Dante writes of being just a journalistic visitor to hell. Charlie also furnishes cause for optimism. Earlier, with Charlie, Barton held up his bloody right palm. Now, as he tells Barton not to be sorry, Charlie displays his right palm, implicitly offering what is known as the *abhaya mudra*, which in the gestural conventions of Buddhism is a signal that means, “Do not be afraid.” The reassurance is welcome because Charlie, as if to help Barton resolve any dilemma along the lines of “To be or not to be,” then says “Don’t be.”

All change implies loss, and all important psychological transitions are experienced with shock. Maturation and progress may require disintegration. Donington counsels that torment is experienced if the life force is opposed. If one is bound to one’s ego, then purification is required prior to revelation. In Buddhism, if one dies while still clinging to one’s ego, and if purification is resisted, then gods come to facilitate liberation from ego, but will appear frightening and will smash the subject between incarnations in preparation for rebirth. Thus, terrifying deities mirror the observer’s egoism. It is because of these secular attachments that Rainer Maria Rilke begins the second elegy from his *Duino Elegies* with, “Every angel is terrible.” Also, given this film’s preoccupation with heads generally, and Charlie’s decapitations particularly, it is worth noting that ferocious Eastern deities often appear with severed heads.

Charlie demonstrates the ambivalence of archetypes. Like the wrestler in the dailies, he begins the scene in his wrathful aspect so that what would otherwise be a blissful experience is horrific for the tenaciously ego-conscious Barton. Charlie is the sublime abyssal monster who transcends ethics and employs the violence that is needed to smash the ego, thus providing ecstatic release. Accordingly, he functions as just such a vanquisher of earthly bondages by liberating Barton. Barton may still not be ready spiritually, but he is at least freed physically, though only from the bed, not the handcuffs. The screenplay has Charlie saying, “I’m getting off this merry-go-round.” This line is not featured in this film, but will be used in *The Hudsucker Proxy*. He then affirms, “I’ll be next door if you need me.” As emphasized in the essay on *Heavenly Creatures*, the dark side is never far away.

Barton earlier read from the second chapter of the book of Daniel. The story now seems to echo the next chapter, the very first word of which is “Nebuchadnezzar,” the title of Bill’s novel. In this chapter, three men defy a power-driven tyrant by refusing to worship idols. They are thrown into a fiery furnace, but remain unharmed. A fourth person is seen, appearing “like the son of God” (Dan 3:25). The four men who find themselves surrounded by fire in the current scene are Mastrionotti, Deutsch, Charlie and Barton. Persistent symbolism in this film puts Barton in the role of Jesus, who descended to hell prior to ascending to heaven. In the gnostic, Hermetic mode, the crisis is interpreted psychologically as an inner journey to confront the terrors of one’s own unconscious, or what Lipnick will describe as wrestling with one’s soul.

Charlie says of the package, “It isn’t mine,” and indicates his head yet again. Barton takes his script and the box that may contain the remains of Audrey. He leaves Calypso behind, but is on his way to meet her analogue. The last time that Charlie is seen, fire surrounds but does not consume him. For him, the blazing hotel is perhaps like the magic fire that guards the sleeping Brunnhilde.

Pluto's chthonic underworld is a place of gestation and rebirth. Descent (*kathodos*) brings with it the hope of cleansed re-emergence (*anodos*). Persephone is the guide in the abyss. Perhaps Charlie's fire is a frightening form of her torch. Barton succeeds in surviving his descent into the realm of death, while the detectives do not. The corridors of the Hotel Earle form a labyrinth of tests and trials like those necessary to prepare and qualify one for the burden of transcendental experience, though it is stipulated that *transcendental experience* is oxymoronic in practical terms. In *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Joseph Campbell writes of Kali, "Only geniuses capable of the highest realization can support the full revelation of the sublimity of this goddess. For lesser men she reduces her effulgence and permits herself to appear in forms concordant with their undeveloped powers. Fully to behold her would be a terrible accident for any person not spiritually prepared." This principle will again apply in subsequently considered films such as *Like Water for Chocolate* and *Whale Rider*. In the same work, Campbell tells the story of Phaëthon, which is one of chaos resulting from overreaching by the improperly initiated, and also writes, "The problem of the hero going to meet the father is to open his soul beyond terror to such a degree that he will be ripe to understand how the sickening and insane tragedies of this vast and ruthless cosmos are completely validated in the majesty of Being." This quotation and these issues will be revisited in a different context when *Heavenly Creatures* is considered.

Barton returns to the office not of Mr., but of Colonel Lipnick, which recalls Odets's *Jacobowsky and the Colonel* (1943), the book *The Colonel: An Affectionate Remembrance of Jack L. Warner* along with Salvador Dalí's 1951 painting *Portrait of Colonel Jack Warner*, and is also a parody of "General" David Sarnoff.

Indicative of consubstantiality, those "little yellow bastards" toward whom Lipnick aims his malevolent xenophobia are the same color as Charlie's ear pus and the substance oozing from Barton's walls. Earlier, when it seemed that Lipnick was going to be mad at Barton, Lipnick ended up firing Lou instead. So when Lipnick now appears displeased, one is wary of jumping to the conclusion that Barton is in trouble. Alas, he is. Inspiration (*spiritus*) is not what Lipnick seeks, and he indicates this by saying, "Don't gas me." He is oblivious to the irony of his assistant being named Breeze. It may be a good omen and only superficially ironic that Barton now has "the Breeze at his back."

Lipnick borrows an expression from Richard A. Rowland, president of Metro Pictures, who once said of United Artists, "So the lunatics have taken over the asylum!" As an antidote to Barton's Hinayana asceticism, Lipnick offers the rather gnostic, Mahayana suggestion that "There's plenty of poetry right inside that ring." The ritual ("the act itself") is not Nirvana. It is merely a vehicle for the revelation of the radiance and is not itself the destination. As further discussed in subsequent essays, any object can serve as such a vehicle, even a Wallace Beery screenplay. Barton at least pays lip service to consubstantiality by characterizing his script as "Something about all of us." Lipnick continues the assertion of the iconoclastic alternative to idolatry and the equation of Barton with the Jungian feeling function when he asks, "You think you're the only writer that can give me that Barton Fink feeling?!"

Following an accusation of solipsism, Lipnick demands that Barton be "out of my sight," but "in town," like the kingdom of the father that remains unseen though it be spread upon the earth. Barton is told to "get lost," which is what Bill tries to do with respect to his self and what he involuntarily accomplishes by dying. Barton has already dodged the latter bullet and will be fortunate if he can lose his self in the mystical sense without suffering a less opportune form of

perdition. Lipnick's final words ("There's a war on.") may be supplemented with his words from just moments earlier: "both physically and mentally." It is the physical war that has receded far into the background.

The beach ushers in the epilogue just as it defines the exit from the prologue. The location recalls Odets's 1926 radio play *At the Waterline*, and may have been foreshadowed by Lipnick's pool. The sea is a standard Jungian symbol of the unconscious, and water has associations with baptism and spiritual cleansing.

From Hollywood, Barton has probably traveled west to the ocean. People who have died are said to have "gone west" because that is the direction of sunset, where the sun dies only to be reborn in the east. He carries the box in his right hand, though the screenplay specifies his left. In chapter 3 of *Ulysses*, Stephen asks, "Am I walking into eternity along Sandy Mount Strand?" The proximity of this name to Santa Monica has already been noted. Like Barton, Christopher Isherwood at one time worked as a screenwriter. Once, when asked from what part of England he came, he answered, "Santa Monica."

Barton has always been psychologically unprepared to receive wisdom, but circumstances now reflect his readiness. His trial by ordeal involving the servicemen, the detectives, the fire, and the chastisement by Lipnick has now left him cleansed just enough to deserve further initiation.

The turning point in the life of Stephen Dedalus occurs in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* when he is at the beach and sees a girl who is looking out to sea. Her appearance is compared to that of a sea bird. Barton now observes the approach of a woman designated in the credits as Beauty. In her second shot, two birds walk near her. Stephen's encounter is preceded by a hellfire sermon. Barton encounters Beauty following the fire at the Hotel Earle.

In this final scene, birds are seen walking, flying and diving into the sea. In *Transformations of Myth Through Time*, discussing figures surrounding an image of Brahma, Joseph Campbell points out "a gander, the wild goose, which is at home on the land, in the water, and in the high air. Consequently he is symbolic of the spirit of the lord of the three worlds and informs all of the worlds."

As the bearer of occult wisdom, Beauty is at first difficult to hear. In this respect, she is like the grace Thalia, who, as noted in the essay on *Like Water for Chocolate*, can be heard only by the spiritually adept. "For God speaketh once, yea twice, yet man perceiveth it not" (Job 33:14). The possibility of gnostic revelation then arises when Beauty finally becomes intelligible to Barton. "Then he openeth the ears of men" (Job 33:16).

Beauty observes, "It's a beautiful day." This line also occupies a corresponding position near the end of the Coens' *Fargo*, though in the context of a very different climate, beauty being independent of such particulars. Incidentally, though little of that film's action takes place in Fargo, a sufficient justification for its title is the word's resemblance to *farrago*, a confused, jumbled hodgepodge. Also note that both *Fargo* and *The Big Lebowski* feature ransoms.

Barton is asked, "What's in the box?" This question is the direct ancestor of the same question that is asked in the film *Seven*, where it also occurs in the final scene and with the same presumed answer (see also *Dune*). Barton, however, says, "I don't know." Barton describes his script as "Something about all of us." However, when Beauty asks of the box, "Isn't it yours?" Barton replies, "I don't know," though Charlie has disclaimed ownership.

What, then, *is* in the box? As if to offer a piece of a woman (such as Audrey's head) as a superficial answer to this question, Lipnick earlier says, "Let's make it a dame part. Keep it

simple.” Looking beyond such simplicity, what is in the briefcase in *Pulp Fiction*? Is Schrödinger’s cat dead or alive or both or neither? (Eighteen years after making this observation, this writer was delighted to see Larry Gopnik present “Schrödinger’s Paradox” in *A Serious Man*.) Maybe this is where Pappas and Swain come in. (In 2017, they will resurface in George Clooney’s *Suburbicon*.) In a similar situation, Ludwig Wittgenstein says that what is in the box is not a matter of fact: “The thing in the box has no place in the language-game at all; not even as a *something*: for the box might even be empty. - No, one can ‘divide through’ by the thing in the box; it cancels out, whatever it is.” In *The Elements of The Arthurian Tradition*, John Matthews quotes Pamela Travers as saying, “Myths never have a single meaning. They have meaning itself.” Thus, the contents of Barton’s box is not *a* mystery, but mystery itself. (In Henry Purcell’s *The Fairy Queen*, the allegorical figure of Mystery personifies the concept. Also, in *A Serious Man*, Mr. Park will say, “Please. Accept the mystery,” and Larry will observe that “we can’t ever really know what’s going on.”) Similarly, the name of the female character in this scene is neither *a* beauty, nor *the* beauty, but simply Beauty. (As to the contents of Pandora’s box, see the essay on *Like Water for Chocolate*.)

Barton acknowledges that his acquaintance incarnates the beauty that they both attribute to the day. A possible commentary on cinematic aesthetics may be inferred when Barton asks, “Are you in pictures?” and Beauty replies, “Don’t be silly.” Silliness has its place, but, as Wittgenstein cautions, one should pay attention to one’s nonsense.

Earlier, Barton leaves the picture of Calypso behind in his hotel room after hearing Charlie say, “I’ll be next door if you need me.” Now, Beauty assumes the posture of Calypso, implying the Mahayana realization that inspiration was available the entire time, though the name Calypso means “the concealer.”

Depending on subjective predispositions, this finale can be seen as richly allusive. For example, it could be said of Beauty, as it is of the milk woman in the first chapter of *Ulysses*, “maybe a messenger. . . . lowly form of an immortal.”

Barton may have unintentionally contributed to the death of his parents. In Aeschylus’s *The Eumenides*, the Furies, who seek vengeance for such things, are propitiated by Athena, the spirit of wisdom. The Furies become the Eumenides (kindly ones) and grant mercy. Perhaps Beauty will provide Athenian intercession for Barton.

Orpheus, who is allowed to visit the home of the dead and return alive, is beheaded and his head is thrown into the ocean, where it continues to sing the song of the muse. Barton has survived his own underworld journey and now finds himself at the ocean carrying what might be a severed head.

Odysseus is detained for seven years on the island of Ogygia with the nymph Calypso, who offers him immortality. He rejects the proposition and leaves, but Poseidon wrecks his ship and he takes shelter on the island of Scheria. Athena favors him by arranging for him to meet Nausicaa, the Phaeacian princess of that island. Athena appears to her in a dream and gives her reason to wash clothes near the place where Odysseus is sleeping. Nausicaa and her maids do the laundry in a river near the sea and then bathe, play, make noise and wake Odysseus. He is disheveled but praises Nausicaa’s beauty. She then becomes the vehicle by which he finds his way back home. Barton ends his stay at the timeless Hotel Earle and leaves behind his picture of “Calypso,” but Lipnick holds him to his studio contract, the typical duration of which was seven years. Barton is unshaven when he meets Beauty at the beach and tells her she is beautiful. A character in Barton’s play speaks of waking. Beauty is perhaps waking Barton as Nausicaa does Odysseus, offering the hope of a similar renewal and recovery.

Charlie and Beauty may simply be two aspects of the same mystery. Barton perceives its violent form while he is in an immature, egoistical state, but he survives to have a chance to advance, like the hero who voyages into the abyss and returns. Bill, who said that he could not escape his self, was not so lucky. The hero is also the one who can live out of his own nature and integrate the various aspects of his psyche, including the shadow.

The waves on the beach come and go. Trying to hold to such a shape is counter to life. Barton has maintained a rigid, resistant attitude, but is invited to accept reality rather than rely on abstract ideals such as that of “the common man.”

Finally, a bird plunges into the water, as it were yielding to and affirming life, becoming part of the cosmic dream. Can Barton now see himself in others, find common ground with his fellow man and yield with compassion? Are his sins venial and therefore pardonable? If wisdom is only acquired through suffering, then has Barton suffered sufficiently? Is he now “awake” and on his way to release? Will he recognize this incident as an opportunity for healing and progress? Does he see Beauty as just a woman or will he regard this as a kind of theophany? Might he even experience that sudden flash of enlightenment known in Zen as *satori*? In short, has he seen the herald? The closest thing to a good omen is the fact that the wallpaper seen during the credits is again gold, as it was during the titles.

As noted at the outset, *Barton Fink* resonates with the works of James Joyce, whether or not directly derived from them. Developing this idea beyond the examples already given, some additional correspondences will now be considered. (It is also noted in passing that just as Joyce’s *Ulysses* is based on Homer’s *Odyssey*, so too is the Coens’ *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*)

There are many cross-references among Joyce’s novels, as there are among the Coen brothers’ films. Both sets benefit from being considered collectively and holistically. Joyce’s stream-of-consciousness technique was also later used by Faulkner. Joyce was influenced by Dante. Audrey’s death echoes the death of Dante’s Beatrice. The brothel scene in *Ulysses* is overseen by Bella Cohen, while *Barton Fink* is overseen by the Coen brothers. Chapter 9 of *Ulysses* concentrates on the brain and literature. In *Barton Fink*, the emphasis is on the head, and Barton is a writer.

Leopold Bloom is often said to be the best-realized average man in literature. Barton strives to create a “living theater of and about and for the common man.” Finnegans is a hod carrier. Barton’s play is about “simple folk.” In *Re Joyce*, Anthony Burgess writes, “Joyce’s aim was the ennoblement of the common man, and this could best be achieved by letting the common man speak for himself.” Barton has similar aspirations for his writing, but does not let Charlie tell his stories.

Stephen declares, “The instant wherein that supreme quality of beauty, the clear radiance of the esthetic image, is apprehended luminously by the mind which has been arrested by its wholeness and fascinated by its harmony is the luminous silent stasis of esthetic pleasure, a spiritual state very like to . . . the enchantment of the heart.” Barton seems to have just such an experience when he first sees “Calypso.”

In *Portrait*, it is said that in a “lavatory of the Wicklow Hotel,” water went through a hole in a basin, producing a loud sucking sound. Barton’s bathroom sink in the Hotel Earle is underscored. Stephen, in a hotel bedroom, “could hear the din of traffic.” Barton, in a hotel bedroom, writes as the second line in his screenplay, “Early morning traffic is audible.” Stephen’s father brags to a friend about being a better man than Stephen. “‘But he’ll beat you here,’ said the little old man, tapping his forehead and raising his glass to drain it.” Charlie points

to his head and says that he would be no match for Barton at “mental gymnastics.” To Stephen, letters cut into a desk “stared upon him, mocking his bodily weakness and futile enthusiasms,” as could be said of Barton’s mosquito and the typing of Ben’s secretary. It is said of Stephen, “He had tried to build a breakwater of order and elegance against the sordid tide of life without him and to dam up, by rules of conduct and active interests and new filial relations, the powerful recurrence of the tides within him. Useless. From without as from within the water had flowed over his barriers: their tides began once more to jostle fiercely above the crumbled mole.” Bill tells Barton, “I’m buildin’ a levee. Gulp by gulp, brick by brick. Puttin’ up a levee to keep that ragin’ river of manure from lappin’ at m’door.” A petition for universal brotherhood, which Stephen does not sign, is circulated and a student says, “Three cheers for universal brotherhood!” Barton makes similar pronouncements, but remains aloof. “The yellow dripping” and “greenwhite slime” are mentioned in *Portrait*, as is a “burly policeman.” These correlate with the film’s various fluids and Barton’s *The Burlyman* script.

Bloom’s ancestral home is in the East. Barton has come west to Los Angeles. Hollywood is for Barton, like Dublin for Joyce, a center of paralysis. The isolation of Barton’s hotel room recalls the Martello Tower, which Campbell describes as “a realm totally removed from the world.” Joyce transforms *Dublin* into “Dyoublong” in *Finnegans Wake*. Barton has little contact with the other residents in his hotel, has trouble integrating into the studio community at Capital Pictures, says he knows few people in Los Angeles, and is asked by Beauty, “Isn’t it yours?” Stephen and Bloom urinate side by side. Barton and Bill are in the restroom together. As a windbag and as the boss of Lou Breeze, Lipnick is a good candidate for Aeolus, the god of the winds who gives his name to chapter 7 of *Ulysses*. The murdered “ear, nose and throat” doctor recalls the “eye, ear, nose and throat witness” in *Finnegans Wake*. Curiously, Bill’s initials “W.P.” appear later in the same sentence that mentions this witness. The film’s typewriters make the same tapping sound as Stephen speaks of in chapter 3 of *Ulysses*. Campbell identifies this as the tick of time, as represented by the drum in the hand of Siva.

Barton borrows some of Joyce’s crucifixion imagery. Chapter 6 of *Ulysses* has many references to nails, such as fingernails and coffin nails. An echo of these appears in comic, diminutive form as Barton’s thumbtacks. Stephen Dedalus is knocked down by a soldier, echoing the wounding of Christ by a Roman soldier. Barton is knocked down by a sailor and later receives his stigma when he swats the mosquito and displays his bloody palm.

Both Barton and Bloom experience antisemitism. However, it would be hard to find a Jewish character who does not. Barton’s bed squeaks, as does Bloom’s. This comic device is obvious and would be expected to arise accidentally. Stephen has bad eyesight and Barton wears glasses. Superficial elements like these correlate with Joyce, but nonspecifically. They are, nonetheless, potentially amusing.

Like *Barton Fink*, *Portrait* has references to waking. It is said of Stephen that “he had awakened from a slumber of centuries.” A woman is described as a “soul waking to the consciousness of itself,” and Cranly says, “Lynch is awake.” In *Ulysses*, Stephen says, “History is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake.” Campbell calls this “Joyce’s first statement of the main theme of *Finnegans Wake*.”

Stephen has his shoes off when he is on the beach with the bird girl. Barton keeps his on, perhaps failing to recognize the sanctity all around him. Of the girl that Stephen encounters it is said, “She was alone and still, gazing out to sea.” The event is described as “the advent of the life that had cried to him.” The text continues, “no word had broken the holy silence of his ecstasy. Her eyes had called him and his soul had leaped at the call. To live, to err, to fall, to triumph, to

recreate [sic] life out of life! A wild angel had appeared to him, the angel of mortal youth and beauty, an envoy from the fair courts of life, to throw open before him in an instant of ecstasy the gates of all the ways of error and glory.” It remains to be seen how Barton will respond to his call. Stephen thinks of the mystery creation as he sees two midwives as he strolls on the beach in chapter 3 of *Ulysses*. Barton declares himself “a creator.” Bloom’s encounter with a woman on a beach is of a more erotic character.

Barton Fink ends with a sea bird plunging into the water. In *Ulysses*, a man has drowned and Stephen Dedalus meditates on whether he would save a drowning man. The decomposition of the drowned man recalls Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* and the notion of “sea-change” of which Ariel sings in the first act. Now that Barton is at the sea, such a change may be in store for him.

Borrowing a word from chapter 3 of *Ulysses*, *Barton Fink* may be taken as a cinematic meditation “on the contrasmagnificandjewbangtantiarity.” In *Wings of Art* (and to a lesser extent in *Mythic Worlds, Modern Words*), Joseph Campbell explains that this portmanteau word is formed by the interpolation of the words *transubstantiation*, *magnificat*, *jew* and *bang* into the word *consubstantiality*.

Stephen contemplates consubstantiality when he notices that the residue on his handkerchief is the same color as the sea: snot green. The same could be said of Barton’s bilious wallpaper and a few other objects in the film. The novel also features the “dull green mass” of the sea, and Stephen’s mother’s bile. Consubstantiality could also be attributed to the reunited triplets in *The Hudsucker Proxy*. Earlier in that same meditation that yields the word now under analysis, Stephen, specifically reflecting on the issue of hypostasis, thinks, “A *lex eterna* stays about Him. Is that then the divine substance wherein Father and Son are consubstantial?” *Lex Eterna* would make a good brand name for the “tacky yellow wall sweat” underlying Barton’s wallpaper, that liquid also being specified in the screenplay as having the same color as the liquid that drips from Charlie’s ear. It is perhaps just such “divine substance” to which Barton refers when he speaks of “the stuff of life.” In spite of all his talk, in practice, Barton is uncomfortable in the presence of the common man. Like Stephen, he is afraid to yield, but needs to learn that he would only be sacrificing his secondary character. Robert Ryf says that Stephen Dedalus “will never really achieve his announced vocation as a creative artist until he perceives and partakes of the common substance of man,” which Barton’s “wall sweat” nicely symbolizes.

Transubstantiation is the displacement of natural substance by divine substance, while the *magnificat* is the Virgin Mary’s celebration of her divine pregnancy (Luke 1:46), which in the West is regarded as a unique event. Buddhism teaches that the divine substance infuses all beings, even if most do not recognize it. Beauty asks, “Isn’t it your’s?” but Barton responds, “I don’t know.” Someday he may. The word *jew* applies to Barton as well as to Bloom and Jesus. *Bang* proclaims the immediacy of the divine. In chapter 2 of *Ulysses*, Stephen says that God is “a shout in the street.” The radiance is omnipresent and ubiquitous, but invisible to the uninitiated. Lipnik offers this lesson to Barton when he says, “There’s plenty of poetry right inside that ring, Fink.” All objects embody the mystery of being and any object is adequate to help one ponder that mystery (see the discussion of the *idam* concept in *Heavenly Creatures*). But Barton, for all his “spouting off,” refuses to yield to the god in the form of the common man.

Links to James Joyce are also to be found in the films of Richard Linklater. *Ulysses* is read from in *Slacker*. That film and *Before Sunrise* both involve wanderings through a city over the course of a full day, the latter film coinciding with Bloomsday (June 16). *Before Sunset* begins in Shakespeare and Company, the first publishers of *Ulysses*. A principal character in both *Before Sunrise* and *Before Sunset* is named Celine, a name that appears in *Ulysses*. In *Before*

Sunset, in harmony with *Finnegans Wake*, a joke is made about being a character in a dream, temporal simultaneity is spoken of, and it is said that “time is a lie.”