

SPECTER

Human life is a grass that does not exist for long / a froth that soon passes by / a flower that quickly fades / a worm that hurriedly closes up / smoke that does not last long / a fire which is quickly consumed / water that soon recedes / a candle that soon melts down / a glass that quickly breaks / a dream that shows nothing / a wax that quickly softens / a rose that soon pales / a meat that quickly stinks / a small boat that soon sinks / a shadow that immediately disappears / a wheel that never stands still.

Pointed grass doesn't bother the porcupine.

A snake lies in the grass.

Love does not select the blade of grass on which it falls.

Every blade of grass has its own drop of dew.

The grass that you scorn stabs you in the eye.

Medical syndromes are named after their discoverers, in this case the Swiss natural scientist Charles Bonnet, who lived from 1720–1793. Bonnet observed and described an unusual medical problem in his own family. At the age of seventy-seven, Charles Lullin, his maternal grandfather, successfully subjected himself to an operation that was both dangerous and painful at that time—the removal of a cataract. Bonnet's grandfather began to suffer from vivid hallucinations eleven

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Mononoke, Vinylfarbe auf
Baumwolle, 200 x 140 cm,
2008

years after the operation. People and objects appeared in his field of vision without prior warning and then disappeared. They became larger and receded. If he looked at the tapestries in his apartment, he saw the strangest transformations of people and animals, who, as he immediately recognized, originated in his brain and not from the loom.

In ophthalmology, scotoma (from the Greek word skotos = darkness) is understood to be a section of the field of vision for which reduced sensitivity exists. It is known as an absolute scotoma in the case of complete sensitivity loss for this section (loss of sight), while partial sensitivity loss is known as a relative scotoma.

She had a small scotoma, which lay immediately to the left of her line of vision and contained approximately ten percent of her field of sight. When she stretched her arm forward and looked at her hand, her scotoma was twice as large as the palm of her hand.

“The fact that I see pictures in this scotoma is the most unusual,” she said and sat down. “I see dozens of them in a day, not constantly, but again and again, each for a few seconds.”

“What do you see?”

“Comic figures.”

“What?”

“Comic figures!”

Most patients described a great deal of diverse hallucinations that varied during each new hallucinatory episode. Sometimes certain objects were seen repeatedly, but stereotyped hallucinations were rare. The hallucinations contained both known and unknown images. They appeared both in black & white and in color. They could be clearer, equally clear or less clear when compared to objects seen through normal perception. They could show intrinsic movement, movement of the entire image or no movement at all. Sometimes the hallucination moved in unison with the movements of the eyes. Most patients only hallucinated with open eyes. Some perceived hallucinated objects as floatingly through the air or as projected on a wall or ceiling. Others reported that the objects fit well with the surroundings (an unreal person sitting in a real armchair, for example). Patients who hallucinated with their eyes closed were aware of the hallucinations in the dark subjective space behind their eyelids.

To make an exaggeration, it could be said that we all constantly hallucinate and that we produce what we call perception simply by deciding which hallucination most likely corresponds to the current sensory input. However, if the brain does not receive any response in the form of visual stimulation, as is the case with Charles Bonnet-Syndrome, it has free reign to create its own reality.

Coming from the capital, he had originally intended to pay a visit to an old school friend in this remote provincial town, but because he had neglected to make an appointment and vacation time in the summer months was generally used for smaller trips and recently also for more extensive long-distance travel, he was unable to locate anyone and the neighbors were the ones to inform him that his friend had traveled to France, more specifically to Paris, in order to relive and extend the honeymoon he had made many years ago, now with the necessary financial resources.

It was still early in the morning and half out of curiosity, half from a sense of duty to do something sensible with his time despite the missed meeting, he hastily decided to hop on the next bus headed towards the countryside.

When the last houses of the town had disappeared into the distance, the street began to wind its way along a broad course of a river, where the stops were increasingly located in smaller villages, following one another at greater and greater distances. The lively hustle and bustle in the bus at the beginning had also ceased completely since the last stop. Namely, since the group of teenagers who had taken over the back of the bus and had tried to surpass each other in boisterousness, excited by heat and vacation, had gotten off at the last stop. He had repeatedly turned around to the group, who unintentionally had evoked images of his own schooldays for him. Now that it was completely quiet in the bus, to his surprise he felt a certain relief that he had not been able to meet his friend.

Outside, the street made a sharp curve to the left; the bus left the course along the water, and turned into a thickly wooded grove. The trees soon encroached on the ever-narrowing street. The driver slowed down, opened a window and the sultriness in the bus subsided into fresh forest air. The deciduous trees, which he could not precisely identify, exuded a fine fragrance. Memories of smells from his parents' house were conjured for him allowing him to drift, while single beams of the midday sun falling through the canopy of leaves danced on the dusty window before his eyes. He was roaming through the garden of his childhood when in the next moment the woods had already begun to thin. The first houses to the left and right of the street emerged apparently from nothingness, rapidly increasing into a small village with narrow streets in poor condition, and before he knew what happened to him the bus came to a jolting stop on a small market square. The

few passengers hurriedly got out, were met and disappeared into the surrounding alleyways. The driver had gone into one of the two restaurants on the square and could no longer be seen.

He got out, crossed the square lengthways, turned around a corner and suddenly found himself on a kind of riverbank promenade again, which bordered a broad expanse of water and from which one could observe an extensive grass landscape on the other bank at a distance of several hundred meters, which ran out in gentle hills on the horizon and from which the river at his feet coming from his left hand as it were, flowed gently along the houses of the town only to disappear behind a group of low buildings on the outermost right edge of his field of vision. Several narrow rowboats were moored to the pier, attached to metal staircases, and at some distance he caught sight of a deserted platform with a rusty signpost, which on closer inspection turned out to be a billboard of a boat lender who offered boat trips to the other bank and through the winding canals of the grassy landscape. Photos were illustrated, including recent ones, and an actress, whose name escaped him, smiled out at him from one of them. Apparently a film had been shot there and the grassy landscape had been used as scenery. For lack of other attractions, an attempt had been made to lure a couple of wealthy tourists to the area with guided tours through the sites of former film locations, but this big business appeared to be long beyond its prime and the boats had been abandoned.

Always attracted to abandoned places whose histories have fallen into oblivion—rid of their pasts and with only fragments of worn objects remaining, suggesting empty vessels to those who enjoy watching time trickle away through their fingers—he chose one of the boats, checked the oars and finally let himself drift out onto the water. Here, he noticed that the apparently so sluggish surface possessed a current that was not insignificant, and however much he struggled with the oars, the small town had already disappeared from his field of vision when he finally reached the green side.

He drifted a while along the riverbank in order to find a suitable docking area and finally turned into a small branch of the river, which rapidly became narrower. The oars soon became unusable and subsequently he unhinged one of two, stood on the rear seat and began to punt the boat forward. After a few meters he ran aground. Even when standing, the grass towered far above him and a pressing heat engulfed him now that he was no longer in motion. The upper ends of the stalks swayed gently in a light breeze and a hissing sound lay in air, which swelled up quickly and then soon died, sometimes reaching his ear from the distance, sometimes intruding on him from his immediate surroundings.

He climbed ashore, made sure that his boat lay secure and groped his way forwards, carefully bending the long foliage aside. It went more easily than he

expected, the grass was elastic and parted eagerly in order to include him, only to reassemble itself into a green wall directly behind him. He stumbled forward clumsily at first, but after a short time he stormed through the green grass that surged at his body wave upon wave, broke over him and covered him like water, except that the current here was caused by his own movements. Frolicsome, he soon ran here and there, finally letting himself fall and rolling in the sweet, high tide. Lying on the ground, for a long time he watched how the stalks opened and closed above him.

He thinks the actress has come to see him, but she is a woman from his past.

I want to melt in your arms, to be brought back to life between your lips, to lose myself in your hair. My body is a vain dungeon; your footstep makes the earth tremble.

He sees an eel winding through the grass towards him. He writes his desires on a piece of paper and ties it around the eel's neck.

How do we talk of something ambiguous, continually shifting, a constant presence that is forever absent? How do we describe the mysterious body always on the verge of discovery, the apparition already disappearing in the mist?

His body dissolves, he becomes the grass.

The wind picks up, whipping the writhing grass, and it becomes sinister for him.

He discovers a path and follows it. Suddenly, he believes he senses the presence of other people; at first relieved and later full of fear, when he realizes that they are carrying guns.

From behind and slightly above we can see them all at once, moving within the unifying boundaries of their collective fear, yet still on the threshold of individuation as they scan the grass, itself moving in waves all around them. No one of them can ever know if he is making the right response, responding to the right response, covering the right patch, monitoring the right wave in the grass, until it is already too late. Until a shot rings out and somebody is about to cross the thin red line which separates the state of living embodiment from the state of corpse.

He tries to find his way back, stumbling directionlessly and in panic through the grass, and finally falls into a deep hole filled with water.

Some miss the path due to blindness and some fall into the fountain with seeing eyes.

We're all trapped in our own moving box.

There are times when the great outdoors shrinks phenomenologically to the scale of a prison, and times when the indoors expands to the scale of the universe.

My eyes are combustion chambers, churning orbs of blood blazing by the light of the sun.

Kim Nekarda