

“Singularity”

In kindergarten, Mrs. Dickie instructed me to keep my letters equidistant or, in her own words, “Line them up like soldiers in a parade.” In fact, I played with plastic soldiers and, upon her advice, I did, indeed, line them up. This analogy was understandable and sensible. Until that point, my letters tended to lean on each other, intimate and indolent. It was my first introduction to the notion of space as an agent of function or conformity. The aesthetic appeal of letters parading at arm’s length was well within my superpowers as G. I. Joe.

A few years later, while on our way to the cottage, mom looked back crossly at her three boys fighting in the back seat. She said, “Scooch away from each other. And keep your hands to yourself or else!” *Scooching* meant adding another inch or two between us as a result of compressed hips and shoulders. Remarkably, the strategy worked. Space was a demilitarized zone or the outcome of a restraining order issued by the Justice of the Peace. Of course, the combatants needed buy-in for space to mitigate. *Or else* was just the right codicil.

In my final year of high school, Mr. Olynyk read us passages from *The Canterbury Tales* by Geoffrey Chaucer. One of the details in his endless commentary woke many of the sleeping young men in his classroom. A female character was described by the narrator as *gap-toothed* which – according to him and to cultural tradition in the Middle Ages – indicated a large sexual appetite. I was gobsmacked. Apparently, space between a young woman’s front teeth was an open gate to Xanadu and a beacon to my own adolescent prurience. Thanks to Mr. Olynyk, I joined a secret and admittedly sexist society, the Fraternity of the Incisors.

Ten years later, I and my wife-to-be punctuated our courtship by watching reruns of the 1960’s classic, *Star Trek*. We two and millions of others experienced a visceral thrill listening to the opening line, “Space: the final frontier.” And it was still possible to believe that the

expanding universe reflected our own interior moral progress, especially during one particularly daring episode wherein the very white Captain Kirk kisses the very black Lieutenant Uhura. But, of course, cosmologists are as fond of the Big Crunch as the Big Bang. Accordingly, our expanding hopes for human improvement have since collapsed upon themselves into movements that reframe slavery as black immigration, indigenous land claims as special-pleading or vaccination as voodoo. It's space as balloon theory and we're running out of ways to keep the human project afloat.

And outer space, apparently, is no greater a wonder than inner space. On a microscopic level, 99.99% of the human body is empty space. As with the stars, the space between atoms is incomparably large. In effect, the stars are atoms writ large. And as much as we try to define space, space defines us. The dark energy of outer space pushes everything further apart, bequeathing loneliness and inconsequence in its wake. Similarly, our physiological spaces favor metabolism and function but, too, the morbidity of expiry dates written into DNA, accidents and happenstance.

Case in point, when my son was two weeks old, he was whisked away in an ambulance to the Hospital for Sick Children. He had been experiencing suffocation while nursing. After a round of tests, doctors diagnosed *localized deformity of the tunica media* and *vasoconstriction*: in layman's terms, the artery connected to his heart was too narrow and this caused dangerously high blood pressure. Surgery, we were told, would provide more space.

I remember looking through the window in the hospital waiting room and up and into the night sky. Through my fear and through my tears, I could not even imagine how one could open up space in so tiny a passageway. Might it require dragon's teeth or a sacred relic? And then I saw them. Millions or billions of stars seemingly fractions from one another. It was true. Our

imagination and our technology were opening up true measure of the colossal space between them. For my son's sake (and my own), I would wish upon a star.

My wife and I are much older now. We tend to view both space and time as the weird sisters of origin stories or, conversely, in the vernacular of physicists, the center of a spacetime singularity from which no light or matter can escape. In the kitchen, we routinely check the large calendar for news of places we need or want to go - medical appointments or visits with our adult children. We describe the span of our years as multiverses, still unlimited possibilities but, for us, investments of clearly diminishing returns or defined benefits. We see our three physical dimensions as we see trees and rocks and archaeological artifacts: the subjects of recycling, scarification or carbon dating. Our failing bodies, in the final analysis, are merely event horizons beyond which we are helpless observers.

But, for what remains, we still touch each other's skin – eyelids, elbows, lips, shoulders, ears, toes, the sexy bits, all of it – with the absolute knowledge that lovers share a perfectly hermetic gravitational field whose stars are pixie dust from the wings of fairies. Kirk and Ohura understood that - they who kissed on the set of the starship Enterprise eschewing the color-skewed NBC peacock for the immortal phoenix and age-old suicide watch for an infinitely big, infinitely intimate point of space.

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