

**PART THREE**

**THE  
NEMMED  
IS I**

23  
AUTOBIOGRAPHY  
OF A NO-BODY

To Simon, R. I. P., and to Gaston's fingers

Here lies a Father, who on Earth,  
Was neither rich nor great,  
Yet what he left, surpass'd in worth  
A Nobleman's estate'

Ω

Charles Eatson Wentworth  
Marquis of Rockingham, Earl of Malton,  
Viscount Higham of Higham Ferriers,  
Barron of Buckingham, Malton, Wath, and Harowden  
and Baronet in Great Britain,  
Earl and Baron of Malton in the Kingdom of Ireland,  
Lord Lieutenant and Custos Rotulorum of  
the West Riding of Yorkshire,  
City of York and County of the same,  
Custos Rotulorum of the North Riding,  
and Vice Admiral of the Maritime parts thereof,  
High Steward of Kingston-upon-Hull, Knight of the Garter  
and first Commissioner of the Board of Treasury  
Born May 24th 1730, died July 12th 1782<sup>2</sup>

Ω

To the memory of  
John Higgs  
Pig killer  
Who died November 26th 1825  
Aged 55 Years<sup>3</sup>  
Ω

Here lie the bones of Elizabeth Charlotte,  
Born a virgin, died a harlot.  
She was aye a virgin at seventeen  
A remarkable thing in Aberdeen<sup>4</sup>  
Ω

'To be is to be related', as a wise man once related. People are summed up in a few lines on tombstones, and this makes graveyards great places to think about identity. The epitaphs above describe some of the deceased's relations with the community: beloved father, titled gentleman, pig killer, and tart. Not everyone, however, relates to someone in the same way, nor considers the same qualities important. The Marquis' epitaph is long and detailed, but it does not even touch on his character; his subjects may have thought of him rather as that posh bastard in the manor. Poor Elizabeth Charlotte the harlot reminds us of the human tendency to simplify creatively and poetically. Had she been born Elizabeth McBaggis, she might have been remembered for her delicious haggis instead. Epitaphs resemble brains in a sense. They are simplifying devices. Like an epitaph, a brain cannot possibly store every piece of information concerning a person, so it simplifies according to its own sense of aesthetics.

One way to describe a person would be to write the mother of all epitaphs, and to update it constantly whenever anything happened, every time a granddaughter passed an exam or a hair turned grey. This almighty epitaph would describe every change in the universe in some way attributable to you, but is there any more to you than this? Is there something inside as well?

How me is my flesh? If I lose a finger, am I less me? My friend lost his fingers in a sawmill, but he was not diminished. It meant the end of

## NEMU'S END

his career as a pianist, but he switched his attention to feet, and developed the Metamorphic Technique, which he now teaches around the world.<sup>5</sup> And he plays a mean maraca. Even Long John Silver had a soul, or maybe he didn't, but he had something more to him than a wooden leg. Even more wholesome land-lovers are constantly losing bits. We cut our hair, but do we relinquish ownership at the barber? Our intestinal cells pass in days, skin cells in months, and nearly everything is replaced in six years. Faecal plaque and gallstones last longer than most of our cells. A few tiny bits of bone and some nerve cells survive from cradle to grave, but even within them, the water, ions, and bits and bobs are constantly replaced.

We are more than sacks of organs and fluids. Our interactions go beyond our skins, which constantly absorb from and excrete into the air. Water flows through the body, from wine to urine in a few hours, speeding through a pub-crawler and crawling through a Bedouin. Air is in and out in seconds, but oxygen is kidnapped by haema-goblins and whisked away to distant tissues, where molecules are split in twain, forced through cycles and discarded later. Is that oxygen part of me, or is it just borrowed?

Nitrogen departs as it arrived, too noble to react at all.

Are those molecules parts of me?

If someone farts, that gets a reaction. Fart molecules diffuse into the brain, fart circuits are activated, fart bells ring, the offended nose wrinkles.

Is your fart more me than nitrogen?

Is your fart part me?

If I eat Bombay potatoes, are the potatoes me?

Does a molecule that winds up in one of my cells become me?

If it ends up in a sperm, and then in a womb, and in a baby, is it mine then hers then his?

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<sup>1</sup> Humans have, in fact, long identified with discarded protein. Voodoo-style dolls were made using the blood, hair or nails of the victim almost everywhere from Haiti to New Zealand. In the Carpathian mountains, a headache was thought to be because a mouse was using one's hair to make a nest, and Namosi chiefs would follow a hair-cut with a spot of superstitious cannibalism to ward off misfortune. Perhaps I was unconsciously tuning into this pagan habit when I collected my fingernails for several years as a child.

## AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A NO-BODY

We are more than arms and legs, more than cells, hormones, and secretions. We are more than our genes, more than vehicles for their code wars. Genes are the nouns, but they are not the storyteller, and the storyteller changes as much as her body. Whenever we eat, we are sticking things onto our cells. We spread margarine along our intestines, salt our meat, slot caffeine into receptors. Every bite adjusts the balance, as does everything else that passes through us. The 'flu sneezes and sweats its way through in a few days, hijacking cells and stealing supplies for the next invasion, but is it part of me? A sneeze begins as an itch and explodes back into non-existence, but was it me, or the virus?

Am I in the snot-cloud?

Am I part virus, part of the time?

Cancer makes a home in a lung or a bone, and it grows wrong. At least we can imagine that 'flu bugs are independent entities, but cancer is simply our own cells gone haywire, confused by a gamma ray or a benzene ring in the wrong place. The victim declares war on the rebel contingent, but even the sharpest scalpel cannot find the line between breast and tumour, and the operation may scar her ego deeper than her body.

Cancer comes swinging in on various vines and leaves a born-again Christian, a Tour de France winner, a fond memory returned to the dust. We change everything we touch, and everything we touch changes us. What goes in our eyes builds our brains. Porn addicts reprogram their glands to respond to the feel of the mouse, rebuilding their bodies in symbiosis with the Internet. We release code into the environment. Our pheromones turn heads and hearts, or gestures send semaphore. Our words twang strings of thought, our sweet nothings liberate hormones, our orders send soldiers to their deaths. We are like snails, leaving a trace wherever we go. New habits and ideas dissolve into us, and as we spend time with each other, our personalities, habits, and turns of phrase melt together.

Some things pass through us virtually unchanged like a samurai sword. Others are rearranged like a curry, or take on a cheeky new protein like a retrovirus. Phases and fashions pass through us; the blue Mohawk, the dreadful hangover, the nervous breakdown, these all pass. The persistently falsetto voice of a young man, his vocal chords the butt of a joke by the trickster god of puberty, this also passes. The kink in a Jewish girl's nose goes, and sometimes returns, surgically removed and

## NEMU'S END

replaced as her tastes evolve, because we change as we pass through time and space, education and intoxication, love affairs and lengthy divorces, dark nights and fresh rebirths, and sometimes we want our kinks back.

We change all the time. 'Andy changes after a few beers.' 'Jane was never the same after Bob joined the Moonies.' 'I'm not the man I used to be before I lost my mojo / cat / frontal lobes.' We all change. The chess spod I once was died at puberty, and I am not a nihilist punk anymore, most days. I even have stopped being a bong-head, and golly gosh, I'm about to be a father, so there are some more changes to be made. Things change. Principles change. Eyesight decays, memories fade, serotonin levels change. You are not your personality, any more than you are your body. You're still you, without a tooth or an eyeball, without that unwieldy opinion that once seemed so important.

Go looking for the soul, but no one ever found it. It is like a frog swimming in a large bowl of black ink. Every flap produces a ripple on the surface, but the frog never surfaces. All an observer here in the world can know about the frog is that it moves the water. Collective reality, where we are obliged to conduct our affairs, gives us four dimensions and a bunch of stuff. Quantum mechanics predicts the world far more accurately than Newtonian mechanics, but whatever spookiness quantum physicists find, it is found on the surface of the ink, on a dial or a computer printout here in the physical world. We cannot find the source of the ripples with conventional techniques. Looking to esoteric techniques, Buddhist practices are some of the most advanced, but the Buddha himself dismissed occult entities as irrelevant and denied the existence of the soul, because speculation about such things does not lead to liberation from them. There may be other, occult dimensions, where mediums and magicians swim with cosmic frogs in infinite oceans of metaphysics, but the effects manifest here as tingles in your palms, images flashing through your visual cortex, ideas popping into your mind, and synchronicities in front of your nose. The physical is already so complex, why complicate it further with ghost stories? Better to calmly watch for patterns emerging on the surface. Nothing else exists. There is no atman. There ain't no frog, man.

We can talk about orgone, *ki*, or plain old electricity, but they are only theories. These ideas explain how lights come on, how little old Japanese Aikido masters can throw burly marines across the dojo, and how faith healers can treat disease, but these things don't exist. Here in the physical world we have a marine on his back and a patient on his feet. We may even have a slightly warmer orgone accumulator, but we

## AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A NO-BODY

don't have any orgone. We have a well-lit room, but we don't have any electricity. It is a concept, like gravity, which can make accurate predictions, but it does not exist. Apples exist, and they fall out of trees, but gravity is an idea. Power and force are ideas, the soul and *ki* are ideas, and ideas are something different.

I got chatting to the owner of a Japanese tat shop in Putney once, and the subject wound round to the apocalypse, as it so often does, and on to the final judgement and the judge. She asked me if I believed in Jesus. I said yes. She wasn't convinced that he existed. Neither was I. 'Well then, how can you believe in him?' she asked. I drew a circle, and asked if it exists. 'Well, the drawing exists,' she said. I wrote  $c=2\pi r$ , and asked if  $\pi$  exists. 'Well, I don't know,' she said. 'It's like a number.' And do numbers exist? I grabbed a couple of plastic blue robot cats from the twenty-sixth century and asked her what I had in my hand. Was it two Doraemons, or the number '2'? Had she ever seen '2'? She thought not. But do you believe in '2'?

$\pi$ , as far as I am concerned, does not exist, at least not in the same way as a blue bit of plastic exists.  $\pi$  is, however, much more permanent than the plastic robot, and if permanence has something to do with existence, maybe it exists more.  $\pi$  is a symbol of the relationship between the circumference and the radius of a circle, and I do believe in it. I believe, my brothers and sisters, for I have seen the mysterious work of  $\pi$  in the world. The circle and the radius exist about as much as  $\pi$ . She didn't ask me if I existed, which was fortunate, because I would have been hard-pressed to explain my (non)self to her.

Jesus describes the relationship between God and us, between spirit and matter. He is a symbol, and a story, like the robot cat, but his magickal powers are different. I believe in  $\pi$ , and in Jesus, because they both work in the world in fascinating ways, and I even believe in Doraemon, though he has never answered my prayers. But  $\pi$ , Jesus, and Doraemon do not exist. Let's not be silly now.

'What is the Great Tao?' Uncle Al used to ask, with a dramatic upturn of his palm.

'The result of subtracting the universe from itself' he would answer, wagging his finger, worshipping his devil.

The something that exists behind the physical world is a 'moot point', as my chemistry teacher used to say when unable to delve further into the mysteries of molecular structure. Not Mr. Baked Bean, my other chemistry teacher; Mr. Baked Bean had all the answers, but Mr. Moot Point had no such bald charisma. He was pretty boring, but at least he didn't talk shit. 'Hmmm,' he would say. 'Moot point.' Jesus,

$\pi$ , and your soul are moot points. These things exist in the way that an elephant exists on the page of an encyclopaedia. There is a description, and a photo of a thing that wouldn't fit in a bookcase. There may even be corroborating descriptions in other books, but there is no elephant. It may exist, but we cannot establish its existence from inside the library. Whether it exists, however, or is an elaborate ruse by the Kenyan Department of Tourism, the effect on the books is the same.

So what about you? Are you your consciousness, following events, identifying with and rejecting bits of the universe? Your consciousness changes constantly, passing from wakefulness to boredom to sleep in the course of a chemistry lesson. Are you your thoughts? Our opinions and reactions are constantly modulated by countless variables, including hunger and sugar levels, injury and disease, the hormones in the blood and the amount of light in a day. Are you the will that sets the waves in motion, that wants one thing one day and another the next, that wants Sally then Sarah then Simon? Is there something at the core? Is there any difference between the you that **is**, the you that **does**, and that which is **done**?

The best metaphor for a human stopped me in my tracks as I was cycling at high speed through the Imperial Palace Gardens of Kyoto, late for a lesson, with a rice ball in my hand and my tie in my pocket. A six-foot vortex of dust was dancing above the gravel in front of me, twisting from side to side, disappearing into nothingness and reforming as I watched open mouthed (and then chewing the rice ball). A dust devil is just on the edge of reality. It exists. You can take a photo of it, and the dust will screw up your camera if you get too close. It is the dust, and also the edge where two bodies of wind meet and twist into a funky helix. Dust is a thing, and bodies of wind are things, in a manner of speaking, but is the interface of two things a thing? Or is it more the site of a thing than a thing? A dust devil is an action in action, a gerund, half way between a noun and a verb, like a happening or a shooting. A dust devil is 'a picking up and spinning around of dust'. And a human is a human being.

A confuzing?

A flesh devil twists her way around the multiverse. She meanders as she twists, wandering from place to place and plane to plane, picking up possessions, diseases, ideas, memories, shaking them up, smashing them together, dropping bits off later somewhere else. I picked up all sorts in Barcelona, including a new and very poncy way of pronouncing *Barthelona*, but I soon stopped that. I learned a new and needlessly complicated way of making a joint. I was served a Spanish omelette by a charming waitress at Barcelona station, and shat most of it out in

## AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A NO-BODY

Montpelier the following morning whilst an irate Frenchman pounded on the toilet door.

A human is a freestyle chaos event, a 'transforming wandering', and the body is one of its results, 'the coagulated, crystallized, or materialised consciousness of the past', as a wise dead guy said.<sup>6</sup> When our movements are restricted with mores, laws, and more by-laws, with codes of etiquette, habits and addictions, and finally with the fear of freedom, we become like dust devils in a cul-de-sac, and lose our power and our beauty.

A human is a streaming collection of tendencies, sending waves into the universe. We are the messages tumbling out of the cortex, riding neurones through the larynx into the phone line and off the planet, bouncing off satellites, massaging airwaves around a receiver on the other side of the world, defusing into the limbic system of a loved one, riding a tear down her cheek. I am that which I do. I am the hand that strokes the cat, I am the ion-flow in her spine, and I am the purr in her throat. 'I AM THAT I AM!' 'I AM THAT I AM!', as something sometimes screams to me through magick mushroom mishmash.

I AM THAT I AM is how God introduced himself to Moses,<sup>i</sup> and how he presented himself to Catherine of Sienna in one of his poetic moments:

The more you abandon yourself,  
The more you will find Me.  
You are that which is not.  
I AM THAT I AM.<sup>7</sup>

The ultimate metaphysical platitude leaves only a few questions remaining: when to flap a flipper, when to act and when to pause, where to leave a footprint, and how to mix a metaphor. 'I' becomes 'I am that which trod in turds and cakes until I gained a sense of awareness, after which I trod in less turds and cakes.' 'I am that which treads mindfully.' What more could you want to be?

The Biblical guidelines on how to be are deliberately confuzing. Uncle Al suggested that we consider every act and every event as the two sides of a dialogue, watching to see what the universe approves of and objects to, and how it communicates with us. For him, the great obstacle was lust of result. We act best when immersed in the present, unconcerned with success or failure, free from our expectations or those of others. If we always act according to the demands of our peers

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<sup>i</sup> See Neuro-apocalypse 2 for more on this phrase.

## NEMU'S END

or the state, we will find nothing in ourselves but residues of others. Taoist texts recommend non-action, seeking the centre, and not taking things too seriously. Trying to change things is often like pissing in the wind, and occasionally like pissing on live circuitry, but the Tao knows what it is doing. Just sit back and watch the pretty patterns. Let it run through you, and occasionally it might move you to act.

We have no idea what is going on out there in the 'real' world, or even if it exists. At best, we think therefore we are, so we should probably think about it. Forget about the test tubes and traffic wardens for a minute, forget about the idiots on TV telling you what is what. Instincts are usually more reliable than conventions. When the two are incompatible, being stubbornly, wilfully obtuse can free not only yourself but also the slaves around you. If everyone is watching TV, moaning about how bad it is, turn it off and invite them for a walk. When a pushy friend insists you join him for a cigarette, even though he knows you have given up, let him know how wrong he is being, and give him a good poke in the ribs if he deserves it. You may be helping him out of his delusions, as the poor soul is confuzing himself with his habits. Non-action often means doing less, but it is not doing nothing, standing still and holding your breath. React, but don't overreact, as Jupiter leans slightly out of his orbit as Saturn passes by, and then returns to his course afterwards. If you have lemons, make lemonade, and may the gods bless your lemon trees.

Keep your eyes open to the magick in every step, because our awareness is our own, as long as we engage it. Our CNS is at the cross between the worlds, between free will and fate, between the magick of the mind and the dynamics of matter. It is the alchemist's crucible, and into it goes matter despised by all men, *terra negra*, which could be either soil or shit depending on the alchemist, but shit makes for better poetry. The raw material is the shit that happens, the shit we go through, and the shit that goes through us. The alchemist takes the raw data of life and the knowledge of books, he mixes imagination into matter, skimming off the scum to purify the essence of his own cosmology. He forms and tests theories, discusses and assesses, predicts and recalibrates, dissolves and precipitates. He tirelessly watches colours change and compounds form. Fumes cloud his vision and muddle his mind, but he finds patterns behind the facts, and patterns behind the patterns. Gradually, as he works, the self merges with the process, the ego disappears into the crucible, and the work becomes the Great Work of the master alchemist working through him.

I started out to discover, perchance to explain, the question of identity, but I give you nothing but metaphor and the autobiography of

## AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A NO-BODY

a no-body. Are we vortices, or the points through which waves intersect? Are we infinitely small multidimensional spots in pineal glands, making tiny adjustments this way and that, seeking the sweet point where all worlds come together? Or are we something else, joining up the dots?

The energy moving through us is never destroyed, only transformed. We fear death because we identify with the body and with the personality, both of which cause as much pain as happiness, but something survives. We die, and leave our crooked backs, our regrettable tattoos and mind-loops behind, but something survives. The body dies all the time, and it is rebuilt. The personality dies all the time as well, unless you are very boring. But something survives. The code you twist, the waves you set in motion, these live on.

Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.<sup>8</sup>

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1 Wilson, p. 23

2 Wilson, p. 51

3 Wilson, p. 76

4 Wilson, p. 32

5 This story is described in *A compendium of the Metamorphic Technique* - Gaston Saint-Pierre (Canada, 2008) pp. 42-45

6 Lama Anagarika Govinda quoted in *Breaking open the Head* - Daniel Pinchbeck

7 *The Wisdom of the Christian Mystics* - Timothy Freke, p. 26

8 *Matthew* 24:35