

Peter Baltensperger

## SHADOWS IN THE SAND

... to be felt aloud

in a quiet field ...

The Man stood in front of the Image. He looked out over a wide expanse extending from his feet to the farthest reaches of an invisible horizon and he asked of the Image, What is the name of the expanse?

The Image replied, The expanse has no name. The expanse is and has always been and will forever be, without name or beginning or end.

And the Man asked of the Image, What matters it then whether I live or die?

The Image reflected the wide expanse and it reflected the waves of the oceans and the light of the stars and it replied, It matters as much as a grain of sand arranges itself on the beach. It matters nothing at all.

The Man: Then I will live and be free.

He turned and walked out into the wide expanse, a solitary figure walking out into the wide expanse. The Image receded behind him and he never saw the Shadow he cast upon the sand.

The Man walked for a long time and the wide expanse grew wider and emptier with every day that passed. The Shadow followed the Man wherever he went, slept wherever he slept, and the Man turned not once to see the Shadow he cast upon the expanse.

Until he came upon a young beautiful girl whose face was pressed so close to a window pane that she could not even see her own reflection.

Come with me, said the Man. We will find the name of the expanse and we will find what it matters how a grain of sand arranges itself on the beach.

The girl looked at the Man and said, There is no expanse. There is only this beautiful world and it will last forever. Stay with me forever and

we will be the world.

The Man pressed his face to the window pane beside hers and he beheld the beauty of the world and he said, There is no expanse. I have reached the end of my journey. I am complete.

And he stayed with the girl for a long time.

After a long time, the beautiful world beyond the window pane seemed to grow dark and into the dreams of the Man came the memory of the Image and the Image seemed to say to him, It matters nothing at all.

But it was no longer a statement the Image made; it was a question it asked of him, and the Man became uncertain of the world and he became afraid.

Help me, he said to the girl. Help me find the expanse and the grains of sand on the beach.

You are a fool, said the girl. There is no expanse. There is only . . .

The Man moved away from the window pane and he saw that the glass reflected his own face and his face was drawn, anxiety hovering just beyond the gleam of happiness in his eyes. He was no longer certain about the world beyond.

He moved away from the window pane and saw that the expanse was still there, extending from his feet to the farthest reaches of an invisible horizon. He moved away and pronounced a judgment and said, This world is only a dream. The girl is nothing but a part of the world that is a dream.

He walked out into the expanse and never once looked back. He walked, and the expanse widened and he knew no longer whither he should direct his steps. The expanse was so wide and so open and there were so many directions in which he could turn, yet no signs to guide him, no mountains to attract him, no people to ask.

The Man looked around him and he trembled in the uncertainty of his steps; fear and trembling held him in suspension until a vision of the Image beckoned to him from afar and he chose his way. Out of the confusion the certainty came to him and he chose his way. He chose, and he felt elated and free.

For a long time he wandered across the expanse and held fast to his way, though there were no signs to guide him. And a mountain rose up ahead of him out of the expanse, a mountain of promise and repose.

The mountain beckoned to him and took him up and the Man climbed and toiled and suffered until he reached the very top high above the expanse.

Up on the lofty height he stood, the expanse and the girl and the fear

and trembling left far behind, and from the top of the mountain his eyes beheld Eternity.

He sat himself down upon a rock and gazed into Eternity. He sat, gazing into Eternity, and Eternity became him.

This is the name of the expanse, the Man said. This is the meaning of my life. I am, and shall be, forever and without end. I am complete.

And he never saw the Shadow he cast upon the rock upon which he sat. Yet into the dreams of the Man came the memory of the Image and the Image seemed to say to him, You are the child born of the finite and the eternal. You must be torn and divided and thrown into the chasm of the temporal infinitude and the certain uncertainty. You must suffer and struggle out of the chasm and yet always remain in the absurd.

And the Man grew afraid and turned towards where the Image had stood far away and he looked out over the plain he had travelled so long.

The expanse beckoned to him and he followed the call, descending the mountain he had climbed. He saw the Shadow he cast upon the rock upon which he sat and his Shadow went before him. He saw that the expanse was filled with shadows, many shadows very much like his own and he could not tell his own from the others.

Is this the name of the expanse, the Man asked. I have risked everything and yet I have become nothing but a face among faces, a nothingness in the void. Is this the truth?

And the shadows spoke and they said to him, There is no shadow but your own shadow; there is no truth but your own truth. And the shadows disappeared and he was left alone once more on the expanse.

He saw the girl and she said to him, Stay with me. And he stayed with her and no longer longed for the Eternal, for it was with him now in Time.

He saw the many ways and he chose his own way and no longer longed for the Eternal, for it was with him now in Time.

Then he saw that the expanse was no longer an expanse but an infinite multitude of plains and cycles and mountains and sand. He saw how the plains stretched far away from him, one behind the other, and the mountains receded farther and farther into the distance, one row behind the other.

The Man looked about him and he said, I shall reach the last row of mountains and I shall find the last of my shadows and a'l the while I shall stay with the girl and I shall choose my ways. For I have become Time in Eternity and Eternity in Time and I shall never cease.

But the cycles revolved around each other and into and through each

other and on the sand the shadows appeared, millionfold duplicated and reduplicated and they were all the shadows of his own self.

There were cities now on the plains, and the cities were set in a countryside of orchards and fields. Rivers and streams and brooks ran through the fields and past the cities and the countryside was filled with fertile life.

The Man entered the cities and he found them populated and teeming with life. People populated the cities and shaped them and formed them and there was unceasing activity and motion. The Man entered the cities and he became part of the activities yet stayed outside of the activity. He became part of the motion yet he never moved.

He partook in the activities and observed the people caught up in the activity and he saw that he beheld Reality.

He stayed in the cities and secured a livelihood, for he saw that the name of the expanse could not be found without being the expanse. But his only goal was to reach the mountains whose end he could never see.

He married the girl and fulfilled love's rich dream, but he never ceased in constantly acquiring and reacquiring the inwardness of his love.

He acquired wisdom, but he found it within himself, in the deadly peril of solitary thought. And he never consulted the many shadows about him. Nor did he ask the people populating the cities and fashioning them after their ideals. For their ideals were not his ideals. He saw that they did not fashion their lives after their ideals but their lives happened to them and they themselves never knew how it came about.

He himself strove towards his own ideals and towards his own wisdom and he never ceased striving and growing, striving past the people and growing above the people put never letting them realize that he strove and that he grew.

And the people never realized that he strove and that he grew, for he kept to himself, and they were caught up in their own deceits and they were blinded by their own success and never realized that they went nowhere and accomplished nothing.

And the Shadow stayed with the Man and strove with him and grew with him and the Man constantly concentrated upon the Shadow and sharpened his awareness of the Shadow.

During all this time he stayed in the cities and his Shadow was like all other shadows, indistinguishable from them. Yet he saw that his Shadow was no longer like the other shadows. It was differentiating itself and becoming a particular shadow which belonged to him and to no one but him, yet no one

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but him could tell.

During all this time he stayed in the cities and submerged himself in the waters of daily routine and no one could tell the difference between him and all the other ripples on the waters of daily routine.

And all the while the mountains beckoned to him from afar and the expanse yearned for a name. The Man longed to reach the last of the mountain chains and he longed to give a name to the expanse, but the mountains eluded his grasp and the expanse refused to be named.

Farther and farther the mountains receded, and the harder he tried to reach, the more he became spread out in time, his present uncertain, his future indefinitely blurred.

He suffered under the weight of being everything at the same time, yet he carried the burden of anxiety with determination, choosing constantly among the infinite multitude of ways, forging certainty out of the confusion. Incessantly he reached out towards the mountains across the expanse, incessantly he laboured under the responsibilities of the cities, spreading himself out.

Doubt and distress filled his life, terrible doubt and distress; but he embraced with passion the doubt and the distress and he chose his way out of the confusion. He accepted the confusion and saw that his way was clear.

He looked at the girl and saw the happiness in her eyes and wished he could be like her. But her happiness was an illusion, and she was caught up in her own despair.

The Man said to himself, Happiness is being complete, and no man can be complete in the expanse.

Happiness makes people stop reaching towards the mountains which can never be reached. The mind escapes the uncertainty paradox of Time and Eternity existing at one single point in space, and the mind is dulled in happiness.

This he said, and he looked at the shadows around him and he saw that they were content.

The shadows said to each other, We know. And they all agreed with each other and never made the wrong choice, for their decisions were based on their knowledge and their knowledge was based on their decisions. He wished he could be like them, without struggle and without pain. But their certitude was an illusion and they were caught up in their own despair.

The Man said to himself, Certitude is being complete, and no man can be complete in the expanse. Certitude makes people forget the infinite

plains and the never-ending chains of mountains. The mind escapes from the absurd and builds a safe nest in a quiet nook. But there are no quiet nooks in the expanse; the mind is numbed by certitude. The supreme paradox of all thought is not to find knowledge but to discover something which thought cannot think.

This he said, and he saw a figure sitting high up on a mountain top, gazing into Eternity. The figure was void of struggle and dread, and Eternity was in the figure. The Man wished he could be like the figure. But its void was an illusion and it was caught up in its own despair.

The Man said to himself, To be is to be complete, and no man can be complete in the expanse. The figure is without passion and has left behind the immediacy which always carries a man further and further ahead. The expanse is not the mountain top, and the mountain top is not the expanse. One cannot be without the other and both are infinite, never complete.

The Man looked about him and saw the Image standing in front of him, reflecting the infinite multitude of plains and the waves of the oceans and the light of the stars, and he saw that the Image was himself.

He saw that the Shadow and the Image and the Man were all one thing and they were all himself, at one and the same time. He saw that he was moving from possibility into actuality and that he was leaping into an eternal understanding of the Shadow and the Image and the Man.

And all the things he could not understand or pin down or classify he called God. And he saw that he had Faith in the things he could not understand because he looked upon them with doubt and with awe.

Then he heard a Voice and the Voice said, Is this the name of the expanse?

The Man looked at the expanse and he said, The expanse has no name but the name I give to the expanse. The expanse is and has always been and will forever be, without name or beginning or end. I am the name of the expanse.

And the Voice asked of the Man, What matters it then whether you live or die?

The Man said, It matters as much as I arrange a grain of sand on the beach. It matters as much as the name I give to the expanse. It matters nothing at all.

The Voice: Then you'll become and be free.