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Trump's Hair

George Gessert

November, 2016

Even after all this time, whenever I see that hair—on television, in the pages of a magazine, glowing on my computer screen—my first impulse is to laugh. The coif is so contrived, so Halloweenish, he looks like a peach-coloured Elvis. But I don't laugh; instead, I feel queasy. I even feel a touch of guilt, as if I had been about to laugh at someone whose head is deformed. Repellent hair—what ill-fated circumstances (there must have been many) led him to violate it? Not that he wants sympathy, much less understanding. He wants magic. He wants to turn back time. His hair is at war with time, with being the age he is. Pop wisdom has it that you are only as old as you think you are. You can age backwards! Buy time! But buyer beware: to the extent that anyone can deny something as intimate, natural, and elemental as aging, he can deny anything.

He will unleash a racist kleptocracy. It will be autocratic and infantile in depressingly familiar ways, but I do not think fascist, except in the loose sense of the word to mean repressive. He is not America's Mussolini. The world survived Mussolini. It has survived worse, much worse—which is no consolation. Trump is the public face of forces far more dangerous than fascism. The world we know cannot survive extreme global warming. This, along with mass extinction and nuclear war, subsume all other dangers.

Physics, as Bill McKibben says, doesn't care. It doesn't care about justice or catastrophes or hair that looks like a duck. Physics doesn't care about the human species. We do not have a Ten Commandments for a time of nuclear weapons, or a Sun Tzu to tell us how to fight mass extinction. We know only that we need something we do not have: a functional ecological culture based on reciprocity and sustainability, whatever those words may mean.

We need the alertness of hunter-gatherers.

A fog of hope rises from the New York Times. Asked about climate change, the president-elect said, "I have an open mind to it." As for humans' role, "I think there is some connectivity." The news spreads, goes viral. Surely this means that he will honour the Paris accords! Surely his declarations about Keystone and fracking, deregulation and scrapping the Clean Power Plan were campaign talk, nothing more. The EU, Ivanka, the CIA, great corporations will rein him in. He'll craft a carbon tax, find solutions. They will serve the ultra-rich, but at this point what other option is there? The graphs keep going up. Ineffectual quasi-democratic incrementalism will yield to violence and authoritarianism. Trump can go down in history as the saviour of the world.

A peculiarity of death is that even when it has long been preceded by decrepitude and illness, even when the signs are clear and we have done our best to heed them, even when we have previously witnessed death in many forms, it can still come as an overwhelming shock. Grief, disbelief, and anger alternate with desire not to feel. Life, with its unstoppable demands, provides ample opportunities. Emails must be answered, appointments kept, the body's needs tended to. Don't brood! Heap up words and actions! But soon enough one learns: this time grief cannot be avoided. There is no shortcut.

December, 2016

Heavy rains returned, so Kate and I drove into the Coast Range to look for salmon. At Lake Creek Gorge they were leaping into the falls. They leaped and tumbled back, leaped and fell over and over again, but they could not pass. Covered with white wounds, few fish will reach their destinations. The run is a human contrivance. In the past there were no salmon in streams above the falls, but enough sports fishermen insisted that the Bureau of Land Management install a fish ladder to zigzag up the gorge. A few fish navigate the ladder, but the vast majority die of exhaustion, or turn back downstream to spawn in a gravelly, quiet stretch of water below the gorge near Fish Creek Road. We drove there and watched salmon digging redds, their gravel nests. The water was full of milt.

In a 1988 interview at UCLA, Noam Chomsky responded to a student's comment that humanity doesn't seem to have "the fundamental bases to deal with major problems":

"If you look at the Earth from an angel's point of view, you would probably describe human beings as an evolutionary error ... I mean, a species ... [with] a fantastic capacity to destroy and very little capacity to overcome [this] ... a kind of blind alley."

Paleontologists estimate that somewhere between 95 and 99 percent of all species that have ever existed are now extinct. The implication is clear: our odds have never been very good. However, humankind's situation is in certain respects unique. Clear-headed people trace trajectories and issue warnings. No informed person can claim that we do not know what we must do: stop using fossil fuels, preserve soils and forests, craft international agreements to substantially reduce greenhouse gas emissions, reduce our population. But even though warnings have long been daily news, response has been so woefully inadequate that hope to avoid catastrophic change had diminished. Now it has disappeared. Trump's election feels like a tipping point. Daily life goes on much as before, but dreamlike, not quite real.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change makes projections that extend to 2100, some eighty years in the future. Eighty years is roughly an average human lifetime in the so-called developed world; many babies born today may see the century turn. IPCC forecasts, for all their value to policy-makers, scientists, journalists, and the public, do not look ahead far enough to provide anything like a comprehensive view of what we face, especially when we consider that greenhouse gases already in the atmosphere will continue to affect the climate long after 2100.

Nor should IPCC forecasts be misconstrued as pessimistic. Each successive report has forecast darker futures. The reports have erred on the side of optimism. We do not know if this bias can be corrected, but since it exists we would be wise to also consider assessments by independent scientists, such as James Lovelock. He has long warned that climate change will very likely destroy civilization. For a time Lovelock was concerned about preserving scientific knowledge, such as of the periodic table and of the circulation of the blood, which he believed could easily be lost if civilization as we know it is at all seriously disrupted, even for as little as a generation. However, that hope faded and he came to believe that as a species our time is drawing to a close. In the face of our extinction, he advises us to enjoy ourselves.

Stephen Hawking, who from time to time issued warnings about climate change, recently said that we have a century to find planet B.

So imagine a world without people. Think how quiet everything would be, how clean and full of reawakened life! Considering the harm that humans have done to other forms of life, biological justice may demand that we go extinct, and soon. However, we have not yet won the right to absolute despair, or even resignation, because all the evidence is not in. No one knows just how high temperatures will rise. Disaster is a matter of degree, in both senses of the word. Soon we may join the trilobites, but as we go, can we save some other forms of life? To save a tree, a bloodroot, even an insect is to affirm life.

A cause for hope is that since World War II our species has not used nuclear weapons in war.

The nuclear threat has not disappeared—far from it—but we have demonstrated a capacity to heed limits.

From Wikipedia I learned that ammonites had ten tentacles and are more closely related to octopuses than to chambered nautilus. The fossil record is extremely rich. Shells range in size from fractions of an inch to more than six feet across. Most shells are beautifully spiralled, but there are also forms without spirals, called heteromorphs. Nipponites, for example, is a tangle of whorls. Some shells have gem-like iridescence, which probably was characteristic of living ammonites as well.

Each shell consisted of a series of chambers called septa. The cephalopod itself was soft-bodied except for its beak, and occupied the largest, outermost chamber. Smaller, older chambers could be filled with air to act as flotation devices. Classification is based in part on the suture patterns of the septa, which are remarkably varied and often as intricate as lace.

Some species lived in schools, others were solitary. Most floated on or near the surface of the oceans, but there may have been bottom dwellers as well. We know that at least a few ammonites squirted ink, because fossilized ink has been found.

They fed on plankton, small fish, and crustaceans, and in turn were preyed upon by elasmosaurus and mosasaurs, tylosaurus in particular.

How intelligent were ammonites? It is not known, but their kinship with octopuses is suggestive.

Ammonites arose some 240 million years ago, and flourished for the next 175 million years, an almost incomprehensible span of time, 875 times longer than *Homo sapiens* has existed. Species, genera, and families rose and fell until ammonites disappeared forever in the extinction event that swept the dinosaurs away.

Hannah Arendt, in *The Rise of Totalitarianism*, argued that at the root of fascism and Soviet communism, which she saw as fundamentally alike, was the phenomenon of what she called “the superfluous”: masses of people who lack places in existing orders. Among her examples of the superfluous are the very old, the stateless, and the long-term or permanently unemployed. Their existence sparks fears that demagogues exploit.

Anyone can become superfluous. So can skills, social classes, economic systems. Religions, cultures—we live in the era of the superfluous. How many people will disappear? What will they do in desperation? What will survivors do in desperation?

Each blade of grass was coated with an inch or more of ice. The storm was beautiful, as ice storms invariably are, but beginning the afternoon it struck and on into the night we heard cracks like gunshots every few seconds. In the forest behind our home countless trees came down, and many more were damaged. The old oak outside our garden made it through the night, but the next morning, as I gazed out into the garden, the tree collapsed in a glittering cloud of ice crystals, tearing down some fifty feet of fence and several smaller trees. Inside the garden the styrax was stripped of half its branches. Other parts of the oak fell across the driveway. Our car now has a concave roof. Luckily the house was spared, but we still have no power. Cleanup will take months.

Jeff,

We're in the midst of a major ice storm. Electricity is out, it's 7pm and dark, but we have a few candles and light from our computer screens. I still have 74% battery capacity on my laptop. Every once in a while I hear cracking, crashing, or sounds like gunshots, sometimes from nearby. I have no idea how much damage has been done, but the birch tree by the patio has shed several large limbs, and a maple to the east of the house has been destroyed.

The threats Trump poses to immigrants, Muslims, blacks, and many others certainly feel more immediate than climate change, ice storm to the contrary, but, serious as these threats are, in the end they are less consequential. No doubt the privileges I enjoy due to my skin color, my gender, and my relative economic security allow me to take this view. However, my privileges do not invalidate it. I am appalled that the situation is so bad for so many. Just before the storm I attended a City Council meeting in which Latinx and many others spoke. Several people wept about what family members or people in their communities face. I know people who for good reason fear deportation. I know families that may be separated. I do not suggest that people who must deal such things should instead be working to slow climate change. I applaud you for doing the work you're doing. But climate is the overriding issue. Only two other matters are of comparable magnitude: global nuclear war and mass extinction.

Time has run out for the old climate system. Perhaps it ran out some time ago, but until the election there was still a trace of hope—at least, that's what I felt. Now it is gone. Yes, Trump could still be stopped by a combination of international and internal resistance, or by some unforeseeable twist of fate, but from the perspective of climate, his removal from office would not be enough. The Senate and House would not only have to be Democrat, but go all out, as few Democrats have ever been willing to do, not even immediately after Obama's triumph in 2008. There simply is no more time for anything less than war-like mobilization, and that will not happen, at least not in the US. Not in time.

What this means is that the two degree “safe” limit will almost certainly be exceeded. McKibben estimates that now we can expect at least an additional degree. Scientists predict that feedback loops will come into play, and no matter what kind of mobilization eventually occurs, much of what happens will be out of our hands.

From now on this is central to human consciousness.

I agree with you that Trump may well enjoy considerable approval if he stimulates the economy. As for answers, I don’t have any, except that we need a culture in which humans stop acting as if they are the center of creation. Native Americans have such cultures, some more-or-less intact. We have a great deal to learn from them, but since you and I are not Native American and don’t pretend to be, most of what we must come up with will derive from Judeo-Christian culture.

The ice storm, it turns out, is “the worst in memory”. That’s a quote from Lane Electric’s website. We have had no electricity for almost four days. All persons “concerned about their health and their animals” are advised to leave the area. I guess I’d better phone a hotel: “I’d like to reserve rooms for myself, my wife, two cats, three sheep, and a llama.”

January, 2017

Hopes die, but new ones are born. Hope is an ocean, rising. According to Kafka, there is an infinite amount of hope – but not for us. Hope bursts out laughing. It contracts and mutates, grows eccentric, unrecognizable. When evil is strange, hope grows stranger still. Sometimes hope is human, sometimes not. Like an ocean, it speaks in languages no one understands.

There is a myth that Karl Marx wanted to dedicate *Das Kapital* to Charles Darwin. I have always liked this story because it suggests that wild nature, industrialism, and age-old aspirations for justice can be reconciled. Marx did in fact send Darwin a copy of *Das Kapital*, however, it was the second edition, and in German. Darwin never read it. Most pages of the copy in his library remain uncut.

Marx must have known that *Origin* endorses, at least in part, Thomas Malthus’s theories, which then as now were anathema on the left. No doubt that is why Marx did not dedicate *Das Kapital* to Darwin, nor to the best of our knowledge even consider the possibility. Ecological consciousness was still in its earliest infancy and the left, with the exception of a few outliers such as Thoreau, ignored the emergent science, to focus on social justice and the dynamics of wealth and power. For Marx, as for most of his peers, nature was a repository of resources to serve humankind. Capitalism and the greater part of the left have always agreed: nature can be

taken for granted. Human beings come first.

This way of seeing ourselves and the world now threatens all life. I trust that hurricanes, droughts, heat waves, and floods of refugees will eventually bring the greater part of the electorate to their senses, but when? Widespread non-indigenous support for the Standing Rock Sioux in their struggle against the routing of the Dakota Access Pipeline is a hopeful sign. *The Nation*, which for more than a century and a half has been the US's voice of progressive anthropocentrism, editorialized immediately after Trump's election that the greatest danger he poses is not to immigrants, Muslims, or gays, serious as those threats are, but to climate.

Many ten year olds know this. An ecological culture has long been gestating within and on the margins of consumer culture. Trump's election and inauguration, like war, may accelerate change. The question is: will the change be swift and deep enough to avoid the worst?

From our car we glimpsed a stream of people walking east along 8th Avenue toward the Federal Building. We parked and joined them, but by the time we reached the on-ramp to the Ferry Street Bridge the crowd was so dense that we could not move forward. Speakers were still out of sight. Rain fell steadily. Pressing in around us were friendly-looking strangers of various ages, ethnicities, and degrees of saturation—some had rain gear, others did not. Many wore pink pussy hats, men as well as women. Shifting breezes carried sounds of distant, amplified voices, but no identifiable words. No one seemed to mind. People talked, laughed, waited. We read placards around us: "This pussy has fangs", "Make America Think Again", "This is What A Feminist Looks Like" (held by an elderly man), "Tinkle tinkle little czar / Putin put you where you are". A block away an eddy in the crowd uncoiled and turned west. The march had begun!

We filled 8th Avenue from sidewalk to sidewalk, more people than I have ever seen demonstrating in this city before. At the first cross street I looked over to 7th and it too was filled with people. The sheer size of the crowd—estimates ranged from 7,000 to 10,000 (I have only a dim grasp of what such numbers mean)—was inspiring enough, but the shared mood was what made it profoundly heartening. A festive spirit prevailed, compounded of hope, grief, anger, joy in the shared moment, and determination to resist.

Trump froths about disaster even as he carries the sin of optimism to its logical extreme. The past can be regained! Clean coal! Make America Great Again! Everyone can be rich!—everyone who looks and acts in certain ways, that is. Or if fate is cruel, as it often is, only a select few will benefit, but so what? They will have their devil's banquet. And after that? Genuine pessimism is never nihilistic, but optimism often is.

A pale yellow witch hazel fills the courtyard with faint perfume. The name, witch hazel, comes from water witching, or so a neighbour told me. I watch a ruby crowned kinglet hop from branch to branch, gleaning among lichens.

March, 2017

I was born two years before Trump, at the dawn of the atomic era. Atom bombs and nuclear war were almost never spoken of in my family. No one seemed concerned, so as a child I wasn't either, but once in a while reality intruded, such as the time my sister and I chanced to hear a radio broadcast about how the Red Bear had stolen plans for a hydrogen bomb. Alarmed, we hurried to our mother.

"Don't worry," she said. "The bombs will be dropped on cities. We live in the country, so we'll be alright."

"But," I insisted, "What will we do about food?" I was old enough to know that most of our food came from city markets, not our garden.

"We can grind corn," my mother said. "We can make cornbread." Our farm had fields of flint corn, the rock-hard kind used to fatten cattle. That afternoon my sister and I ground flint corn between bricks and made meal, which my mother baked into a golden loaf. It was so full of sand that none of us could eat more than exploratory bites, but I was reassured.

We moved to San Francisco when I was twelve. Nuclear drills were held at irregular intervals at my junior high school. Alarm bells would ring, everyone would crouch beneath their desks, and we would cover our heads. Then in a few minutes the class would return to *Evangeline* or the periodic table. I didn't find the drills especially disturbing, partly because teachers never explained them, but mostly because junior high was full of absurdities and worries. Crouching beneath desks was hardly at the top of my list. I was much more concerned about bullies. The drills seemed like play-acting, and I soon realized they were opportunities to briefly join the bad boys by making jokes that ended with the punchline "kiss your ass goodbye."

More useful to my education were the aliens and mutants who swarmed through science fiction. They embodied fears that most children growing up in that era must have known. The adults around me, including teachers, considered science fiction trash, but Ray Bradbury and *Alas Babylon* reassured me that I was not alone in sensing that something was terribly wrong. *Godzilla* and *Invasion of the Saucer Men* confirmed it.

I discovered them just as the fallout shelter craze began. My cousin Nan proudly showed me the one that she and her husband had had installed in the basement of their dream house. The

shelter looked like a concrete outhouse and was stocked with canned goods and medical supplies, including a snake-bite kit. I wondered if rattlesnakes would proliferate after an atomic war. Would they have radioactive venom? But I did not ask. I was afraid to reveal my ignorance.

In those days language about nuclear weapons was rudimentary, and popular will to use that language nonexistent, at least among people I knew, Cousin Nan perhaps excepted. Adults may have felt that children needed to be spared the knowledge that at any moment the world could be consumed by radioactive fire. Perhaps the new reality was so threatening that most adults could not acknowledge it even to themselves. Perhaps Hiroshima, Nagasaki, and the outbreak of the Cold War had produced mass attention deficit disorder. The psychiatrist Robert Jay Lifton once observed that the more important something is, the less likely it is to be talked about. Whatever the underlying causes of the silence of those years, it fuelled rebellion in the 1960s as certainly as did Vietnam, the Civil Rights Movement, Oedipal conflicts, and the pill.

Consciousness today with respect to global warming and mass extinction is in many ways similar to the nuclear situation in the 1950s and early 1960s. Once again stupefying silences prevail, especially about mass extinction and the longer-term consequences of global warming. Existential threats that originate in ourselves are too appalling, too final, and for many of us sufficiently out of sight to seem altogether real. Once again our powers and our powerlessness dismay us. They reveal that humankind's superiority to other creatures, including mice, liverworts, and bacteria, is provisional, at best.

Trump's victory, along with the triumph of the Republican Party in the election of 2016, can, I think, be understood as due to deep-seated racism, and to popular reactions to immediate economic and social conditions, but also to the spectre of environmental catastrophe. Unexamined fears that the future now holds no place for a great many of us lends Trump's toxic nostalgia powerful appeal. The more fantastical his pronouncements the more eagerly they are embraced. He leads a ghost dance. The first one, with its uncanny human beauty, was profoundly tragic. Today's ghost dance is also tragic, but masquerades as kitsch.

April, 2017

Kitsch is an aesthetic strategy to distract from suffering. With Trump, whose hair, speech, and style of governance are nothing if not kitsch, this aesthetic mode has gained the bully pulpit (even more so than under Reagan), but instead of distracting from tragedy, compounds it. Kitsch means lost time, and time has run out. The most that we can hope for now is that resistance, along with the administration's dazzling incompetence, will lessen the catastrophe.

Through the sheer enormity of his folly, Trump brings us back to earth. What a relief it is to be serious!

I avoid looking at Trump's face. If it pops up on my computer, I scroll away. But this is a mistake. I need to study his face, look closely, learn from it.

We live in the most art-saturated culture that has ever existed. Television, radio, smart phones, computers, and vast human-created environments immerse us in art. Most of it is kitsch. I do not know how children colonized from birth can escape, but for most members of my generation there are still ways out. High culture, for all its shortcomings and failures, is one. And of course there are many others. Chinese landscape painting, Northwest Coast sculpture, blues, forests, silence ... there may be infinite ways.

At an art opening in Norway last August, I fell into conversation with three city councillors, two of whom were native Norwegians and the third Hungarian-Norwegian. They compared Trump to Hitler. Of course I objected—I am an American, and any American who wants to be taken seriously avoids comparisons with Hitler. But these were Europeans whose countries had been occupied.

Why not compare Trump to Hitler? Whatever Trump's intentions, he is engaged in crimes against humanity and life that could be far more devastating than even the Holocaust. I tell myself I do not compare Trump to Hitler because I am wary of hyperbole and do not want to dishonour the memory of those who suffered and died under him, but maybe there is also something else: maybe I am afraid. Trump embodies American cultural and moral failure, and to compare him to Hitler, or even suggest that in the end he might prove worse than Hitler, would imply that I have commensurate responsibilities. Am I now in the position of those people who had to choose whether or not to become partisans in World War II? I do not want such existential responsibilities.

Rufous hummingbirds have returned, but three weeks late. Our Asian pear is blooming early. Elegant grey and black hover flies I have never seen before dart among the flowers of an Oregon grape. Someday spring may not be spring at all, but long before that happens the kind of spring that has recurred year after year in the maritime Pacific Northwest since sometime after the end of the last ice age, will be forgotten.

This year's brave new spring has brought a host of medical annoyances. I have recurrent dizzy spells. Dr. L. recommends a brain scan, but I have put off scheduling it. Other medical problems serve as excuses. My right foot is painfully swollen. Cellulitis? Gout? Tests are inconclusive, but I

am taking clindamycin and indomethacin, an anti-inflammatory that makes me drowsy. I doze several hours a day and emerge unrefreshed, discouraged, impatient. It's been almost two weeks now—how long until I can walk without discomfort? When will I regain my energy? Maybe it won't return—always a fear at my age. And—one last complaint—my PSA has risen slightly, doubling time unknown.

In spite of foot problems I took Amtrak to Portland to see my oncologist. Riding north through the Willamette Valley, I was transported by the brilliant greens of rye grass fields. Luminous grey haze intensified nearby colors, but bleached backgrounds. On the horizon Mt. Hood rose pale grey and white, a geological tsunami glimpsed then gone. But not gone: only out of sight, out of mind. How quickly everything is passing.

I had not read Bruno Latour until I chanced on “The New Climate”, an essay reprinted in the latest *Harpers*. He argues that “enlightened elites” have known about anthropogenic global warming for some three or four decades. These elites are so enlightened (his irony can be distracting) that they have deduced, first, that warming will lead to global catastrophe, second, that this catastrophe will come at an extremely high price, and third, that others must pay, not the very rich. Deregulation, dismantlement of the welfare state, climate change denial or dismissal, and the extreme concentration of wealth are all, according to Latour, elite responses to growing evidence that there is no future.

But obviously there is a future. There is always a future—that is the problem. That is why we still struggle with hope and despair. I take Latour to mean that the future will be extremely inhospitable for most of us. “Ordinary folk” (his term for the masses) know that they have been abandoned and betrayed. They are understandably desperate and enraged, but as so often, many are quick to blame scapegoats.

He makes a compelling case. Certainly some very powerful people, including Trump, know about climate change, yet publicly deny that it exists or merits action, especially any sort of action that might curtail opportunities for them. However, I think Latour attributes too much rationality and foresight to his elites. The views of people like Trump on this or that issue, even ones as important as climate change and mass extinction, are much less important than raw power. Ruthlessness and nihilism, along with access to resources, would seem to make elites better prepared to deal with gathering chaos than those who more straightforwardly acknowledge what is happening but feel obligations to others. Freed of the burdens of solidarity, elites might flourish while billions perish—flourish for a while, that is.

James Lovelock once estimated that six billion will die in the coming cull. (This was before he became more pessimistic about human prospects.) Even if he overestimated by a factor of a

hundred, the crime would exceed any other in human history. How many generations would be visited upon by the sins of the fathers? A hundred? Ten thousand? Could the debt ever be paid? Under such circumstances, the obliteration of human consciousness might result, which would make Trump's base ahead of its time.

My mind recoils once again. The notion of a cull belongs to Lovelock and science fiction, and may it stay there, safely cordoned off in realms of speculation. But if circumstances change, if fears of a human die-off move closer to the center, opportunists and managers will emerge. Perhaps they have already. Trump reminds us that there are time-tested ways: racism, nationalism, fundamentalism, authoritarianism, war.

New solutions may also emerge, new religions, for example, or mutations of old ones. Targeted famines. Epidemics of genetically engineered diseases—writers have been warning us about this for close to half a century. Lotteries. Ritual human sacrifice. And there will be attempts to save other forms of life.

May, 2017

We can save ourselves only by saving other forms of life: this is so obvious that it should not need to be stated, and yet it does, over and over again, ad nauseam if that's what it takes. It is the necessary starting point, the basis for meaningful action in a finite, interconnected world, yet in itself does not make a story that can help us find our way into the future. That story is still emerging. I have gathered bits and pieces, but so far have been unable to assemble them. Instructions are in a language I do not know. And even if I find the key, will I have the heart to tell the entire story? Will someone else? We can only hope.

June, 2017

Trump has announced that he will withdraw the U.S. from the Paris climate accords. The accords are toothless, but the best we have. I skimmed the internet and the majority of commentators agree: this is a dark moment, the darkest of his already appalling presidency. I am not shocked by his latest folly, merely depressed and disgusted. He no longer surprises.

Or so I thought. I was startled by the local newspaper's front page photograph. It showed him with snow white hair. At first I took it as a trick of light—the Rose Garden, where he made his announcement, was evidently sunny—but there he was, white-haired, looking more recognizably human than in any other image I have recently seen. For a moment I imagined he'd decided to look presidential. He, or some close associate, must have brooded about

exactly which dye to use. Which one would add the most gravitas to an occasion that, as surely as any declaration of war, will doom many, although probably not for a decade or two? But even as these thoughts flickered through my mind I knew that they were wishful thinking. As if he was capable of behaving seriously, even about his hair. Because if he were such a man, he would never have run for president. No, the color of his hair must have been a printing error. Images on the internet soon confirmed it: his hair is still the color of a peach.