

First Thoughts:

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Dear X—

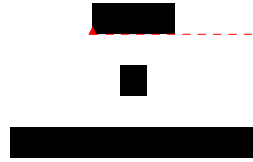
Overall this is a strong, powerful piece of solid fiction writing. You are a master of sentences and crafting images. The trouble I was caught up with was what the images were pointing back at, you know? Where does the thread of the story continue and how can you make the story clear to follow along? Is it language for the sake of language –entirely possible and can be effective- but I would still push you to look at how you can make the language clear to allow the reader access into the world you've created.

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Dark and light shades emerged as all in the garden, in the beginning. The light was blinding from far overhead in the East, *a spill of liquid mercury* that moves up and across at once; it was endless, wide but originally only as high as the height of the ocean's surface—the immeasurable but present distance between wet and dry. The light appeared, then crept from a rounded apex, then spread hotly like lava across the horizon. It was mercury-fast, this black and silver even-spread light, metallic and clear at once, and up, and up, and though it had a center it spread endlessly across the sideways-flowing sea where it drew an irregular line down the sea's center. "The cracked mother of the Earth bleeds," thought Jason, and the blinding white blood from the center of the universe took on fiery colors, orange, red, bleeding those colors into the atmosphere in twisted ribbons that stretched in segments of warm hues as if they were the brushstrokes of a careful artist on an unprimed canvas, dissipating at ends into the black sky, which was now white, now pale, now pale blue, and all Jason could think was blues, cerulean and cornflower, cool blues despite the hot hues winning over the dawn. Forgotten in transitional flashes were the empty black of night, the glistening white starlights, the silver-white blended morning sky. Now everything was colored, even the gray shadows deep in the living green walls that encircled him, and the rockwalls and the linear swells of the water that stretched ahead endlessly, still moving,

Comment [AS1]: Odd – evocative sentence.

Comment [AS2]: How could you make this stand out stronger? It seems buried, yet, essential.

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Comment [AS3]: Confusing.

Comment [AS4]: This is gorgeous type, Mansfield, Woolf type o' stuff. Is it a pastiche or are we working with your own material. Open question.

Comment [AS5]: Bit over the top, no?

still appearing to be fixed forever in place. This happened in a moment too short of breath to breathe in, and then the white light of burning magnesium converted into an earthly fire that could be recognized by color, color that blinded Jason with wonder for the next **expanse of his walk through the meandering garden, in which he was only a visitor.**

Comment [AS6]: So he's in a garden.

End of 1st page questions:

What is being rendered here? Why does the author feel that this needs to be told to us? What is the lyricism of language accomplishing here that the direct statements would not? Is the method that the scene is rendered too opaque, too unsettling for a reader?

Morning glories in white and blue spread wide as he watched. The watery tissue of their creped forms pulled light in and projected the light in shades of cloud-blue and sky-white—the first confused imprints that might emerge to him if he were an animal born without a shelter in the garden. **Blossoms opened in their own time—the ones in the sheltered shade took longer to open—slow motion that gave Jason's breath rapidity to witness—and he wondered why**

Comment [AS7]: I take it time is passing. The observation seems to be extended.

comatose people are called vegetables—because they are immobile? Because they are absent?

Comment [AS8]: Is the focal point of the story? This question. Or is this about the mother earth bleeding? I'm a bit at a loss as to the direction of this piece. Where am I going?

The flowers trembled open with delicate force and were now white and blue forms, dimensional veined trumpets growing into starry discs, in cool blue and white with pure white or dark blue throats, and he realized then that they would not move again until the light becomes too strong to withstand. Vegetative squash blossoms scumbling the ground like pasty paint rolled off a canvas by an angled knife were gold or yellow nuggets that seemed to reflect many midday suns under the sky flowers, and the sun in the sky was now reflecting the smears of paint, perfectly formed as a perfect natural clear orange circle, rapidly ascending.

Jason's time with the crawling delicate early forms of heavy hollow squash fruit spanned hours. His only indication was the movement of life around him. So much time, Jason thought, unaware of himself, only **learning to translate how delicate blossoms withstand the heat of** summer mornings long enough to nurture the seed-core inside that will abruptly dismiss its grace and emerge as a pendulous and imposing figure and claim a space in the world much larger than

Comment [AS9]: This is exhausting to parse out.

- 1 – Jason is spending time with squash.
- 2 – the squash are crawling.
- 3 – the squash are hollow.
- 4 – Jason is spending hours with these squash watching them move.

There's something else here that is not Mansfield or Woolf – something Borgesian that is interesting, yet, troubling as a reader to understand.

Comment [AS10]: Translate to what? You mean transform?

the juvenile blossom. In doing so, it will lose its imaginative colors to become a washed-out squash. What part, then, he wondered, does fragrance play to the flowers themselves, anther or stamen, besides inviting working winged visitors? He wondered if the sweet floral quality vaporizes or fuses cells into each other in new ways to make the sweet taste of the fruit, the way energy converts from one form to another. *His mind wandered the edge of death in the garden*

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but kept within the living walls as a strong breeze tossed heavy leaves and heavy branches without warning and he followed a spade shape as it rose, carried on the wind without thought but with a purpose unknown to it, turning from dull to a blade as it swirled over itself and turned razor thin or ocean surface thin, then flashed light across its waxy cuticle, radiance from the dazzling sun on a deep green surface, and the leaf twisted and pirouetted and thrashed through the open field of the green-floored garden until it danced into a dissimilar kind of leaf on a shrub and touched many leaves, eventually penetrating the bush, absent of itself, and then it became absent to him, to its parent plant, to that first broad feuille, it experimented with and to itself, but not to the mobilizing power of the wind. It will blow through anything until it contacts a rich protected part of ground, wets and decays and then skeletonizes into dry soil.

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Comment [AS11]: Monster of a sentence.

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The wind chilled Jason and he folded into himself, then bent his neck toward the sky to sun his face. *Clouds rushed eastward in traffic patterns only they could regulate as loose*

horizontal layers of airy blue flowers arranged over a dark backdrop invaded from the periphery.

Comment [AS12]: Why not break this in two? Would it hurt the message here? Talk about the clouds, then the flowers.

Also – what's going on with the

Blue bracts spun across a wall of tall oak-leaved hydrangeas. This reminded Jason of his father who told him to bury a nail next to the hydrangeas to change their colors. He blued and was shamed in awe of the massive wall before him. They were still; the hydrangeas were unmoved by his reverie.

The garden pathway was crushed red rock that rattled with each shift of Jason's body and punished his feet despite the quieting of rubber-soled shoes. He walked. The movement kept the footstones from his consciousness. Still, he heard them as they moved. Smooth and round, the rocks rolled together under the pressure of his body. The sound was like flowing water; he thought of water flowing in a pathway through wooded rolling hills, and he imagined hills covered in dried leaves crunching underfoot as he walked, staggered assignments of ferns and herbaceous and woody shrubs tucked into natural pockets in the land. Virginia bluebells there. Here was the sweet nectar of honeysuckle; it tickled his nose from some hidden place. Water crawled through the dark forest, calm, relentless. The water rolled over a compacted bed of humus and rocks worn round by the flow. Reticulated sunlight expanded and contracted with the movement of the water on the gray and brown rocks. The rocks appeared still, but they were moving, crawling over each other, tumbling down a subtle decline toward an unknown end. They made no concrete sound to Jason; he only heard the water—the water that sounded like the movement of dry rocks under the pressure of a moving animal. And then the stones seemed not to make the sound of water, but to rattle; this sound unsettled him, and he left the path and treaded across the lawn to a shady corner where blue flowers glowed ultraviolet.

Comment [AS13]: Shows his bare feet.

Comment [AS14]: But then presents the poor shoes.

Comment [AS15]: I love this line.

Comment [AS16]: Okay – I really want to follow along here but I keep on wondering why. Let's just say this is an art story. Let's just assume that all this is art – let us ask the question openly: where does your reader grow attached to the piece? Where does it start to “count” is it the rich descriptions? Is it the subtle movement? Are we steadily building towards something – and if so – where is it that we will be headed.

Comment [AS17]: Stream?

Comment [AS18]: Have no idea what this sounds like. I'm blind to it.

Comment [AS19]: Oh really?!

There again was hydrangea, under the shade of a grouping of high, solid oaks. The leaves of the oak and the oak-leaved hydrangea were intriguing; they seemed to be die-cut around the edges, intricately designed. The planting itself, the ordering of the like leaves, together, commonly, but apart—this was intelligent design! One leaf was a parody of the other under close scrutiny; apart they seemed the same. The violet blue was what—allium. Allium, allium—but no! These were not, the bells, they were not allium; allium with its powerful, metallic name represented itself in globes, not delicate towers of many nodding bells. The bells

were collective entities; they were not independent actors. The bells acted on his heart; they slowed it. Yes, and now he recognized the name; he could name it!—digitalin for the heart, digitalis from the earth, foxglove. There was something adolescent about the uprising of bells, quietly bowing under the great oak leaves, blue with ultraviolet undertones, and crisp white, and freckles. Leaves whorled up in towers before him; and heads bowed before him. He nodded to the digitalis; he breathed the heavy midday air. He shaded out the grotto with skin blinds over his eyes, and in the darkness he realized the air was heavy with wetness, with fragrance; the air was heavy with the weight of odorous power, now not the lightness of honeysuckle; now with the sophisticated and sultry and complex odor of what was lingering in the dark. It was velvet; it was purple-black in his dark closed vision. Quiet, quiet; it overtook him; it moved through him, this odor, this complexity; and he waited for music; and there was no music; there was no rhythm; there was no pattern, no percussion, not even his heart; there was only purple-black

velvet, soft and shamelessly sensual. *It moved through him, not like the flow of water, or lava; it did not flow; and not like the wind; it didn't move effortlessly and weightlessly; he only could identify this with intoxication, with alcohol, perhaps, or with smooth velvet.* Suddenly—a thought: Pray. You should do that now. You should, you should pray, you should. But no, there was no religion in this, no organization, no ritual, nothing like that; this was only, this, this velvet inside of him, and it smoothed inside of him, velvet, an underwater disease, oo, a sound like an odor, a sound like a feeling, a calling, a passion, a painful movement, odinium now like a metal; and now he had a metallic perception, a taste that was strong, current, but malleable with thought; and thoughts returned to him; and sodium was metal on his rubbery tongue; and he was the insulated conduit of something electrical, indefinable as thought, indefinite, not a thought, not something he could grasp; and it slipped away from him; it slipped, like water over

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Comment [AS20]: So he's drunk?

aluminum sheets, in crevices of rolling stones, worn stones, stoneware, over plates, plated metal, between seams; and thoughts; and the percussion of his heart beat blood into his brain in warm wet pulses. He could see the pulses swell like dense magma in his mind, slow like honey, amber like porous molten rock, in his closed eyes; and it was the light from beyond his eyes, from outside himself; from beyond the membrane of himself; it was external; it was beyond him, and it slipped away inside him for the light, replaced by the light and—and what, what was it, and then what was, and then what is?

Comment [AS21]: I want badly to believe something in here is important. The prayer – hopefully but it isn't signified.

There, when his eyes opened, was the nodding foxglove. There, he saw now, there were poppies with fluttering crepe paper petals and threaded leaves; there, clustered, were angel's trumpets—enormously fragrant, pendulous, dripping heavy like an apocalypse; the angel's trumpets unveiled themselves to him: they were *datura*. Plump, ragged seed heads were beginning to brown among the paper-petaled poppies; *datura* or *brugmansia* flowed seamlessly with intoxicating fragrance from flower to air to Jason through him and somehow he felt it in his toes and he remembered the ground beneath him and he realized that he was treading on life, on blades of grass, leaves, living things. Green things. And what was he but a pink thing. Foxglove nodded knowingly. He felt shame now, and the tannic residue in his mouth lingered still; electricity beat through him; soft wind against his skin now; soft skin now against soft velvet petals of *datura*, white velvet tissue, pink velvet tissue, fissure, conduction, windy convection, movement in the stillness between his fingers and the vegetable. How he could use a shaman now! How he could leave his body and travel back to the healing darkness and the lightness of traveling there, and the weight of being there, and here still, all at once; how the spell could be; the temptation of tasting the bitter bit of petal now torn between his fingers, now on the tip of his bitter tongue! Oh, it was like meat, this thing, red and rare, and alone he felt as a

Comment [AS22]: Voice returns.

cannibal feels alone with another, and he wanted to consume this energy and feel the power surge through him; it was this thing, this brugmansia, this feeling of walking through solids, of being a heavy liquid or mobius gas, of being ether, even in the darkness with his dilated pupils and racing heart; he would purge himself of the heaviness of hydration and drift, drift away somewhere that is nowhere but not here! This is electricity he felt, he wanted to be; this was his charge of dreaming alone. He had discovered the joy of aloneness, of solitary being, his conjoined nature, his dispersion among all things that connect all things. He could not; and he realized it; and he hated it; and he loved it; and he loved life; and he was satisfied with his life; and he wanted to move now to an informal place, a place without form; and yet he could not, and he knew it and realized it, for it was not real; it is not; and formality, his form, his presence—could he touch this? No, Jason thought, you can't touch the infinitive.

Comment [AS23]: Perhaps a page 1 statement – further – it is buried in this paragraph.

The sun had weakened. He knew, with the cool air moving around his self-contained warmth, how far from him the sun really was. Somewhere, he believed on scientific principle, the sun erupted fuel generated by itself into a fat ball of fire that spun around into itself, but was nothing, and was informal, formless, and to him, from where he was, he saw that the sun had a form and a shape and it had fuel and that was the energy that fueled life and around him he saw evidence of this in everything green and solid. Yes, he affirmed by groping his flesh, he was solid, but his essence was dependent on the essence of the sun, essentially formless, essentially nothing. What was the garden, then? What were the flowers? He could feel them; they were as real as he was real. What was their fragrance? Separate from the air, separate from the petals—sweet or full-bodied, bodiless. The garden was darkening. He watched moonflowers expand into silver moonlike discs—morning glories in reverse, rewinding the cycle of the day before his eyes. How did he move? The sun was now gone. His expectations were gone. What had he

learned in this garden? Had he reached the end of it? And was it a circle? And did he come full-circle? He was touched by wind; he felt it, gently—did this complete the thought of the day, of why he had come here? Night came abruptly. He felt things. **He was on a path,** then distracted, but a story was being told and understood by him in his environment—what then, and now? *Nothing* was all he could think; he could think nothing; that was all, not blue, not anything colored. The vegetation had a scent: fresh green evening leaves, a mixed bouquet; and he saw everything he saw before; now a different kind of light. The air was still heavy with dissolved water. **His mouth still tasted metal; yes; something had happened—something had occurred while he was here.** **He could have been anywhere; something would occur anywhere; something** will occur always, here and there. That thing will be dark and light, or else it will be nothing, and it will be a beginning. All this is all days are, Jason thought, his senses barraged by one final flurry of floral scent and brilliant blasts of color as he passed through the arbor-tunnel covered in scarlet-thick bougainvillea, orange trumpet flowers, purple passion flowers, butterfly roses in transition, dangling lilac curls of wisteria, salmon wisteria, dangling, shifting in the wind, bowls and horns, trumpets, drips of petals, curved, fused and broken, ragged, permeating the air around him from somewhere deep within, without movement, without pulses. A moment. All this in a moment. And he knew, suddenly, senselessly, numbly, that he would trade all the time in the world to have all his senses engaged to the point of numbness, of darkness. And then it was gone. Is all this all days are, he wondered? And then, ambling in the dark outside the locked gate, he could not remember, only wonder, where he had been. All there was was dark. But from the dark emerged shapes that could be threatening or could be nurturing or could be nothing but shapes, silhouettes that indicated something; and that thing was light; and that light was

Comment [AS24]: Hmm... doesn't quite fit in the opaque picture you have drawn for us.

Comment [AS25]: ??

something to move toward; and Jason gathered the fabric of himself, the velvet of his skin, soft
and smooth like velvet.

Final Thoughts:

Dear—

An abstract piece should be looked at with the tools of criticizing abstraction. As a short story I believe the in not only Passion, Perception and Purpose but what Frank Conroy believes are the Meaning, Sense and Clarity.

So I begin by asking myself are the three categories mentioned in Conroy's and Alan's lists. You have the perception here. One could argue that the perception is gushing out of this piece everywhere. It is hard to pick up and just read straight through because of this, certain sentences are weighted so deeply with perception that I questioned my own reality. The purpose is a bit opaque and the passion, while it is there, is a bit disconnected to this character that we follow. On Conroy's big three – Again, it's all sense – it's all perception.

Even as a piece of abstract work I would still push you on the meaning and the clarity. I would question you about the passion here. Why is it forbidden in this piece to allow the reader inside? Personally I found it discouraging to read this much and get so little. There is so much damn fine writing here. You're quite talented and have a marvelous way of expressing yourself here. It is beyond lyrical it is poetic – BUT – if you do not know, or are unwilling to reveal the meaning for the reader (and I consider myself a above average reader) than you don't allow your readers to climb aboard on this adventure. This is the stuff of fine poetry but personally I need the three P's or the Meaning Sense and Clarity to get me through.

Yours,

The Staff

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