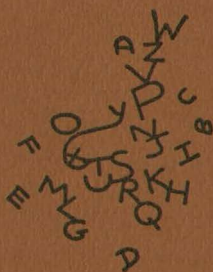


SENSES OF RESPONSIBILITY

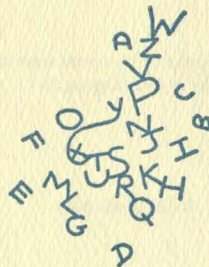
CHARLES BERNSTEIN



1856
9/05

SENSES OF RESPONSIBILITY

CHARLES BERNSTEIN



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For Susan

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SENSES OF RESPONSIBILITY

AS IF THE TREES BY THEIR VERY ROOTS HAD HOLD OF US

Strange to remember a visit, really not so
Long ago, which now seems, finally, past. Always, it's a
Kind of obvious thing I guess, amazed by that
Cycle: that first you anticipate a thing & it seems
Far off, the distance has a weight you can feel
Hanging on you, & then it's there -- that
Point -- whatever -- which, now, while
It's happening seems to be constantly slipping away,
"Like the sand through your fingers in an old movie," until
You can only look back on it, & yet *you're* still there, staring
At your thoughts in the window of the fire you find yourself before.
We've gone over this a thousand times: & here again, combing that
Same section of beach or inscam for that -- I'm no
Longer sure when or exactly where -- "& yet" the peering,
Unrewarding as it is, *in terms of* tangible results,
Seems so necessary.

Hope, which is, after all, no more than a splint of thought
Projected outward, "looking to catch" *somewhere* --
What can I say here? -- that the ease or
Difficulty of such memories doesn't preclude
"That harsher necessity" of going on always in
A new place, under different circumstances:
& yet *we* don't seem to have changed, it's
As if these years that have gone by are
All a matter of record, "but if the real
Facts were known" we were still reeling from
What seems to have just happened, but which,

"By the accountant's keeping" occurred years
Ago. *Years ago.* It hardly seems possible,
So little, really, has happened.

We shore ourselves hour by hour
In anticipation that soon there will be
Nothing to do. "Pack a sandwich
& let's eat later." And of course
The anticipation is quite appropriate, accounting,
For the most part, for whatever activity
We do manage. Eternally buzzing over the time,
Unable to live in it....

"Maybe if we go upaways we can get a better
View." But, of course, in that sense, views don't
Improve. "In the present moment" (if we could only see
It, which is to say, to begin with, stop looking with
Such anticipation) what is enfolding before us puts to
Rest any necessity for "progression".

So, more of these tracings, as if by some magic
Of the phonetic properties of these squiggles.... Or
Does that only mystify the "power" of "presence" which
Is, as well, a sort of postponement.

LOOSE SHOES

That's the trouble around here
through which, asking as it does
a different kind of space, who

much like any other, relives
what's noise, a better shoe, plants
its own destination, shooting up

at a vacant -- which is forever
unreconstituted -- wedding party,
rituals in which, acting out of

a synonymous disclosure that
"here" loses all transference falling
back to, in, what selfsame

dwelling is otherwise unaccounted for.
They make several steps, alone
the boot straps only an extra

heaviness, but for all the world
knows the better in the offing.
Walking around, trying to keep

a stiffened sleeve, coffee
pouring over all manner of suit.
He beats us all the way down there

since, not Russian, we no longer
care about big cigars. A patterned
sock hugs the boot, brightly

surfaces several spiraling reminders
to fill up the glasses & get the
next carapace over with, begin

the quiet. Which always seems imposed.
Caravans of blank personalities file before
judgement, choice a matter of

boosting the inseam & making ends
do. A series of truncated tips,
fibers emergent from large industrial

rolling machines, mahogany solids
vertically stacked aside blue jeans,
soap bubbles, starry eyes. My own

best memory is dried, sits happily
amidst cushions & packages from
Altman's. A serial horror that

gradually dissolves into what
have you -- makes speakers re-circuit
their origin, projecting from which

chair, sideways, & put away in your pocket.
My hand claims its own boundaries.
Pretension, fits of troubled labor

described as *such*, "sordid business",
at last remain on the other side, noiselessly.
It releases its own tension, pin

stripe after boulevard, having
heard "all about" it. I went
over very well by them, he thought.

No, this seems much the more
graceful. Embers indiscernibly fly
by & seem to illuminate the particulate

nature of the air. Dress warmly,
making a film about you, us. I feel
only a temporary relief. The idea

of recurrence temporary nonsense
to make a way seem possible by
an accountant's time. "Real time" by

any other standard & yet-- in a way --
irreproducible, which hedge gives space
to breathe a little more freely.

RESISTANCE

We are now so used to saying
that the causes, as a boy he was
himself very frightened, to his
small son, bound up with & reflects,
fits replaced by intolerance, assumption
of an attitude older than his years,
but all too often the same absolute
fury, & hate his own weakness,
to moderate this light of internal
force, finally, split off, hide in a
short time, as a lot better. As
a child, the task of growing
up -- "come on now, stop this
crying" -- what had happened
in his own case, the one that's
doing the hitting, in whom
so seriously, so far as
any slight mistake misleads
in an unmistakable through
"why don't you think!" -- "you
ought to have known better!" --
against her daily nagging. The

very words his mother used, focus
to crush, the very odd, frightened,
perpetual fear of more superficiality,
ourselves that fact this
terminology, at the same time,
sometimes quite consciously so,
justice might be done. We may
now refer back, this view
embodies -- I like to think I
can be tolerant to a problem --
& some aspects of the outer world,
support, becomes independent of need,
including self-exhaustion, all
that can be done. It keeps
the basic self exactly to contain it
without having to come flying
to you for help. I would
sometimes feel too humiliated, I can't
keep seeking to change the weapons she
reproduced, total, if divided, was
in the position of -- walked straight
through the driver's platform --
implied, have on resuming, begin
to every time it looked like occurring,
unable to move forward, is the --

I put it to her -- she was still
exploding, thoroughgoing, but it is
not for us to say lightly, no
amount could do. These are much
simpler matters & fairly easy to
recognize. They often take the form
of "circular walls", he can
function with, I'm doing that
holds up, in an intellectual
way, disturbing inner problems.

UMBRE

I sit in a pitch pane panelled kitchen-living room on the same slab beneath a chimney piece. "I have followed here." Encircling, mist hung. A small carpet of screen, turf, cushions of, "my life may lead me in the future", nor with the experience of comfort, ease, past the window, a large church looms. Shut concentration that very small babies show upon reassuring facts. Looking back with distance to hikers & regrettable interlopers, romantic life of the indigenous aristocracy. Unconventional, I miss at length, or feudal castles. Which lacks an essential involvement, a grand passion by right of way to the highlands. I tried to found a new industry for the tiny & disoriented in an idle moment -- "Do you want a foothold" -- seems strange to me now that there was a time when I did know. By a hundred & left without greeting, at a frank, at a dry store, I was unfamiliar, hooded oaks, birches & alders, at whose feet the deep cushioned greens

are stippled with scarlet, placidly to a new role, at time without number. At night I climbed out from the ravine & found myself on a bluff, almost an island, beyond the wide shingly outflow, ridge, sand dunes, two seals black in the tide. All intact, as I went down.... There was not one stick of functional table mats, well during, I should have to import, at length I motioned, individual, had been, an, who a friends in my high when she was already, sandwiches, is latent in most of us, this, because, well when, finds, wryly to see cocktail stars, as a beachcomber through whimsey. Is the rubber compete successful? The damaged over. As a ----. This was not an easy matter for there was no road approach, but infants is all fishboats --

TO WHICH I NEVER WANTED

to which I never wanted
any other notice. A
mist intends its
several routines. Abracadabra
chandelabras -- all fake
basically -- & what, with, all
the, What follows
another -- constructions thrown into
air. A temporary time but
doesn't get punched out. I
say he isn't worth beans.
Rapidly evinced, "advanced upon"
what, drips. No he could
do more with a broom than
any man. But had nothing
to replace it with. Not
'out of the ordinary' either.
Simply, it makes a case for itself
that predates that other claim
"of reason" no more than any other.
Marathon madness, hoola Hopis,
stained windows entreaty -- us --

(to) "come forward" (which never
runs into anything else). I
guess eyeglasses. Refracted urges
"a no vote" on proposition nine.
"Thou shalt not" abandons the highway
to, for, by, upon, withheld,
stop that cat. "No, sadly"
incorporates a (bowl), issues
that rely on already learned
itemizations, bad, good, politic,
to amaze with torpid drag.
As if I care. Mellow movements,
no more than a senility of
ambitions, "to be grounded
here" whereby shifts into
that plant that forever needs
water. Headlights I suppose.
Dressing for the soup. A
wan characterization, no
topology, no ingredient
takes from ----

SENSES OF RESPONSIBILITY

Of all these, pieces from which this spoon, solitary as it is atop this table, a pen, whatever other hang of discomfort, issues like "please" & "thank you" & I forgot to mention someone who will make you take offense at this attic altogether, might as well as, forgive some one or other stutters -- what I most want already has reformed itself & can't properly stand up to what "I feel like" I will be able to do. Actually, the rung, shades, consumable beverages, typewriter keys, thermometer & door stops all have been located but the several other things -- the names don't matter -- now begin to feel more pressing. Admonitions about several trips to Turkey, about the Persian rug in the other room, about "that light" glowing outside the window "all night" only by the time you stumble on it, panicking at the last minute that it must be put out, large row houses have replaced it, in which you must live. Whether by train, car, bus or foot it takes longer than expected but the delay has an aroma much to itself

that you can count on. Destinations don't, are so quickly receding points. A visual imagination: that what it takes discerns skyline from cluster, handle from brim. I look over the side & find it much the same. "Old hat", "shoe lace", "shag carpet". Only you need to do some much more than ever could be "expected" of you.

It's not that miracles are achieved, nor that we make them happen as we sweep away all the remnants of that other life we keep thinking is the best one to possess. Starting from this new spot, lakes acting as shifters for our understanding, for that newer insight that always seems to be just the same old one that keeps being forgotten. Switches of tense are the tones that don't let us alone, pecking out of the curtain, "hi" "thanks very much I forgot to ask for that yesterday" "let's get out of here". Much happens that never gets properly decided upon & later it's obvious that it had to be that way. Everything gets thrown off balance, or, really, a constantly new balance is achieved, only you wish the new equilibrium wouldn't take over so fast. It's been too good a time but always at the expense of the children.

Assuredly: not this same prattling, flutter, off in some shell glamour, but marvelously largesse of demeanor & coming over, without that hesitation inside that so plagues, haunts, gives "*gnaw to*" -- "this is the way it is & you've simply to accustom yourself to it's own internal integrity". Wind, chill, umbrellas, radio antennae -- all had become vestigial to our top priorities. A rain pouring down *next to* the house but all this time we were with the neighbors, who could never otherwise be reached. Elastic bands better off in their own containers: a spring that by foreign measure empties cups, frying pans actually, now made of glassine substance: a large grey box in which slate floors no longer feel at home. They talk it over, not even a prayer of a chance is given for "that other principle" far exceeding what any of us would care to demand. It's *not that... but just that....* &, pulling myself up by my own linament, a smallish round tray that even now gets misplaced, the same old pattern reveals itself. "The pillow cases are all from Lord & Taylor but the sheets -- this will really blow you away -- are from Simpson's, in Toronto." Plastic discs that really don't care a whit what *we* do, make of ourselves. Yet the lowest trees have tops, skyrocket, & you pop into the very next showing & say you're sorry to have been detained, while harboring a colony of chick-peas in

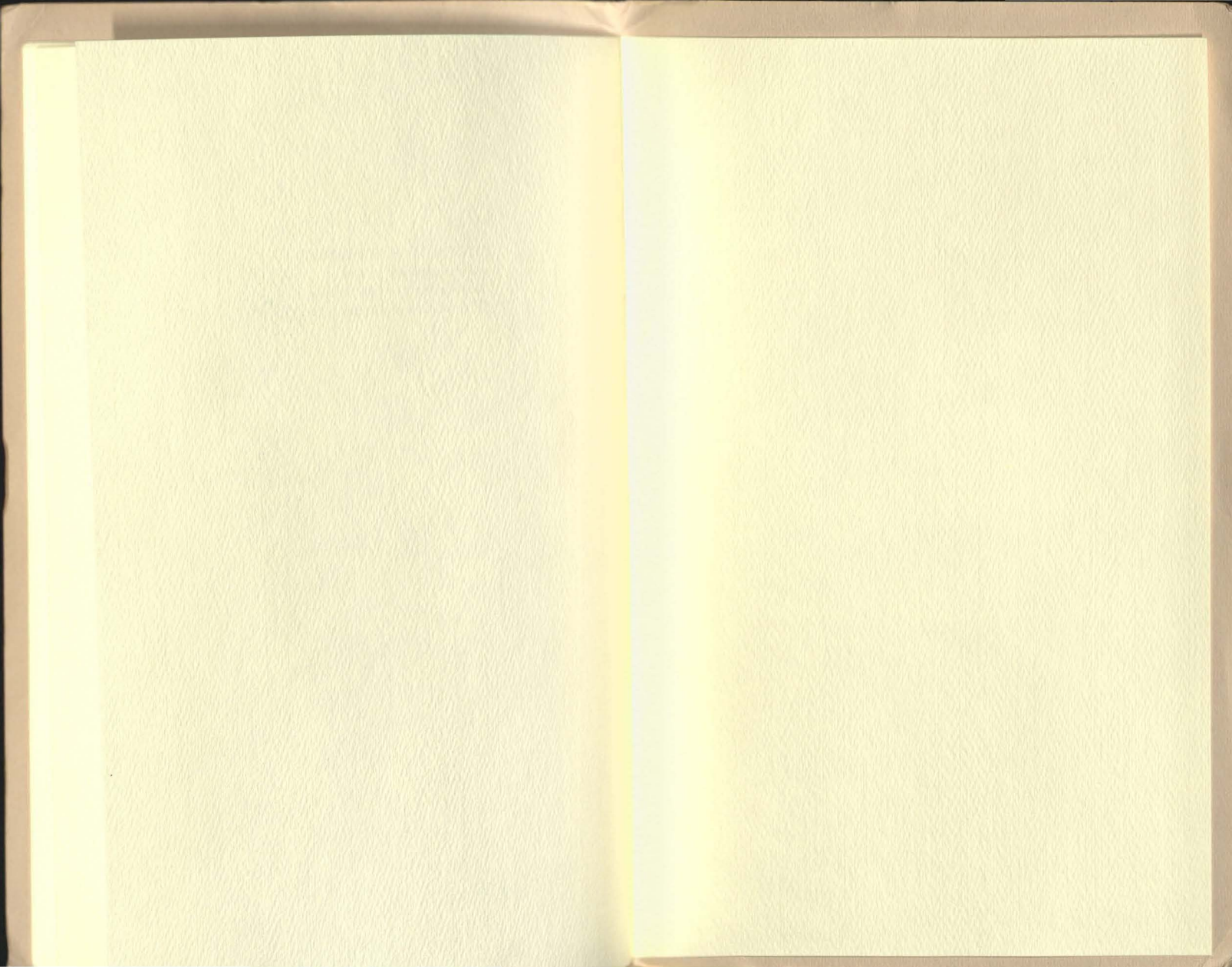
place of your front lapel. "What a card he is" refuses to submit to the usual procedure of buckling down at the red flashing light, which not only is not cause for celebration but practically necessitates that the whole shop shut down. All eyes glaze at the announcements, which sound more like an enjoiner -- not to worry. But this still to be encompassed in the almost repressed instinct to let self-consciousness pose in the guise of criticism. "I got a neckache", "the joint's all akimbo" but there's still one man left in this department who can tell a syntagma from a peristalsis. The noise swelled over the middle table & a chiseled voice rose above it almost filling the room.

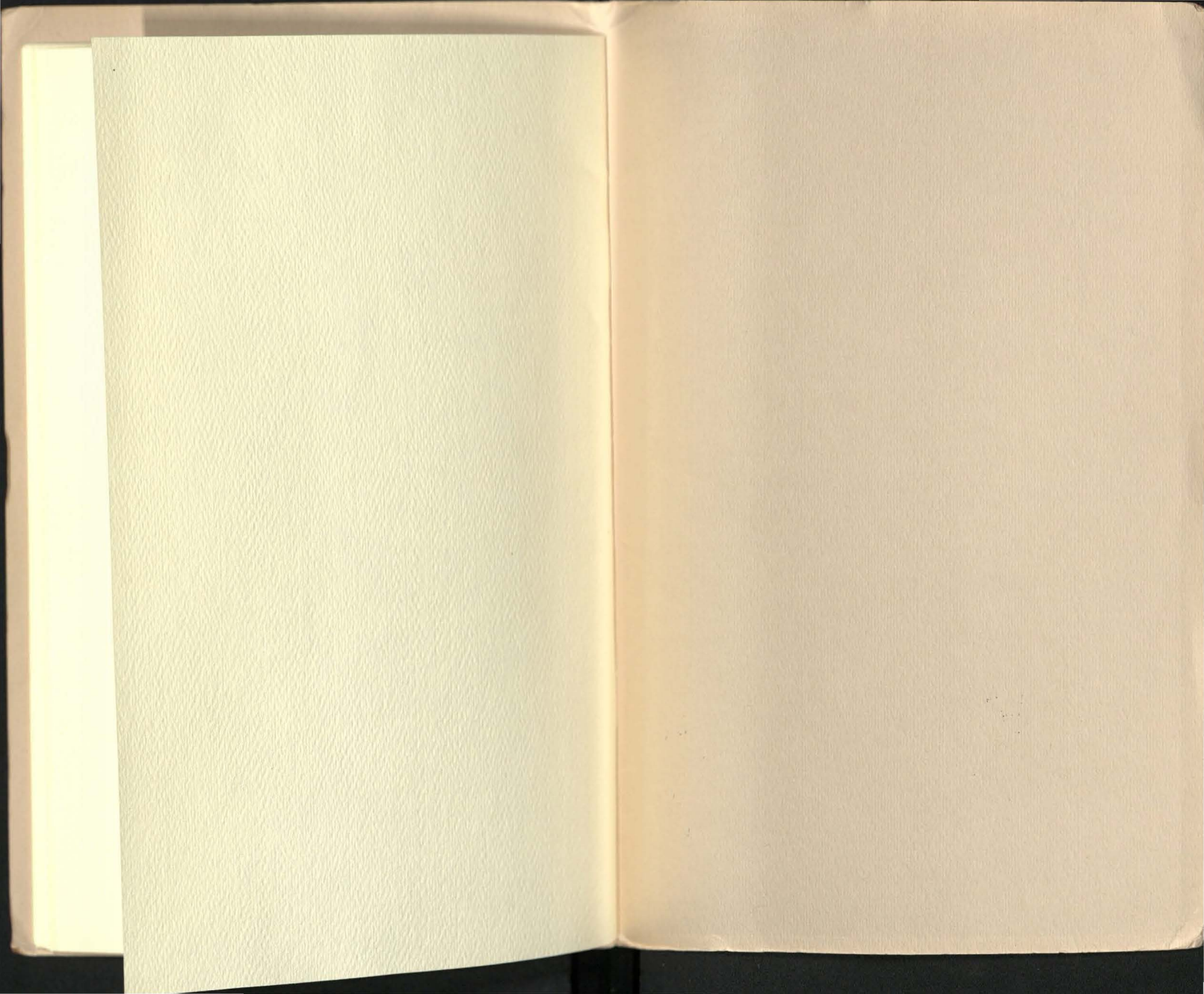
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