

Dear Reader,

Interesting to think that words on a page can create a disturbance in a brain thousands of miles or hundreds of years away. How does that work? If I write: 'first kiss; please pause to remember the taste/smell phenomenon associated with that event, especially the pleasant ones that still have the power to make you happy,' and you do pause & remember – why does that work?

Or maybe I say: 'fresh-cut grass on a summer day.' If you feel something, then it is my brain activity (over here, in the US) that caused it. Suddenly we are in direct connection, mind to mind. We have just established, by implication, that both of us (you, there, in England,¹ say) & me here in my writing shed in Oneonta, New York (door open, dog at my feet, on a clear fall day on which the quality of light is so clean that it has all day been landing on the autumnal woods in a way that makes a person just want to stand there & stare) have each, at one time, experienced a first kiss. And that the effects of those two experiences were not so very different. And that my experience (which occurred in 1974(!), in a 1969 Camaro, parked at the edge of a golf course in Midlothian, Illinois, USA) was similar enough to yours (and how about yours, by the way?)² to evoke what us New Agers might call a 'shared emotional space.'

No matter how old you are, or how old I was at the time of writing (54, & thanks for asking), or how alive you are, or how dead I am, and even if that phrase re the kiss or the grass had to be translated before you could read it – there we were just now, lovingly regarding the same human experience, our brains encouraged, by words, to jump through roughly the same hoop. And we were somehow expanded by that. You now believe more fully in my existence and I in yours. We think more highly of one another. And we think better of everyone else too. It seems more likely to us now that other people actually exist. We have experienced a brief elimination of what we might call the 'I/Other' boundary. Soon enough (yes, yes) that boundary springs back into place, and we are merely ourselves again, believing ourselves separate from everything else. But for that brief moment, our understanding of our relation to the greater world was correct.

All the best,

George Saunders³

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Interesting to think that words on a page can create a disturbance in a brain thousands of miles or hundreds of years away. How does that work? If I write, "first kiss; please pause to remember the taste/smell phenomenon associated w/ that event, especially the pleasant ones that still have the power to make you happy," and you do pause; remember — why does that work? Or

¹ While our editorial office and indeed our hearts are very much based in England, Mr Saunders and others may wish to note that at the last accounting our readership was distributed across Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Canada, China, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Hong Kong, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Kenya, Latvia, Lithuania, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Nigeria, Northern Ireland, Norway, Nottinghamshire, Poland, Portugal, Scotland, Singapore, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand, Netherlands, Turkey, Russia, USA, and Wales. Greetings to all of you across the world. We hope you are experiencing a brief elimination of the 'I/Other' boundary at this very moment. And a special salute to the subscriber who, with a surge of regional pride, put 'Nottinghamshire' as their country of residence.

² One member of our editorial team, in response to this question, told a long anecdote about a patch of sandy-soiled woodland on the edge of a housing estate in Thetford, Norfolk, 'circa 1988'. We think further details are unnecessary.

³ George Saunders was born in Amarillo, Texas, grew up in Chicago, and graduated from the Colorado School of Mines with a degree in exploration geophysics. On the subject of his education and early career, he recalls: 'I'd never met a writer and so it took me a while to realize that a person could actually write for a living.' Since this realisation, the *Wall Street Journal* has said of Saunders that he 'helped change the trajectory of American fiction.' In addition to his latest book, *Tenth of December*, Saunders has written prize-winning children's books and three other short story collections: *Pastoralia*, *CivilWarLand in Bad Decline* (a finalist for the PEN/Hemingway Award) and *In Persuasion Nation*.