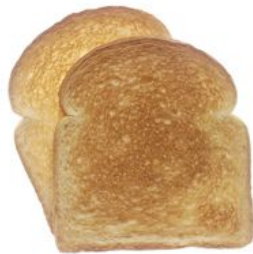


## IN WHICH I TURN TO WORDS

A statistician named Galton did a study about mental imagery in 1880.

It turns out that some people can imagine images vividly, as if viewing the real thing.



*vividly  
imagining  
images*

While some people are completely unable to form mental images.



*completely  
unable to  
visualize*

*me*

Like most people, I fall somewhere in between, but closer to the *unable* side.

I first read about this when I was seventeen, and I was really surprised.

So I asked my friends about it.

A lot of them *could* imagine things vividly, so they didn't understand at first.

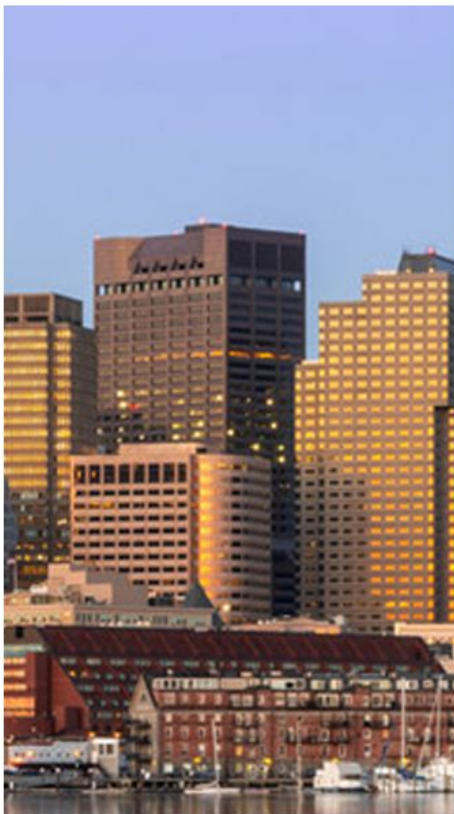
Let me try to explain.

When I imagine the Boston skyline,

I sometimes see dots of color,

and I see vague outlines.

But mostly, I imagine words.



Learning about this explained a lot of differences with how I experienced things.

It means that to visualize diagrams with more resolution than haze,  
I have to draw it out.

It makes doing geometry hard without paper,  
which some of my friends could do well.  
And unlike others, I wake up from dreams  
only left with *the impression* that I did something.

I had a dream when I talked to a friend. I could imagine, say,  
what his voice sounded like. I could describe to you the scene  
in perfect detail. We are sitting on a bench, the two of us, in a

park in my hometown, back in the Philippines. I can hear his voice very  
clearly. I know he's there, in the bench, with me, but I don't  
see anything. I don't see the park, the bench, or his face. And  
sometimes, I wish I did. I wish I could talk to him, as if beside  
him, because sometimes, Messenger doesn't cut it, you know?  
very very very very  
park park park park  
park park  
very very

It's inconvenient, sometimes.

But at times having an imagination that works through words helps.

When I write, and I have to describe things, I only have to read off  
what I see in my head.

New York, for example, is grid. Concrete and asphalt  
fighting against nature.

It is the result of perfect  
planning funneled through  
imperfect hands of people.

Many parts are dirty and dingy, derelict and decayed,  
drenched, and damp, and these  
parts are splayed out so  
often, so much, so visible,  
that the passers-by learn to  
ignore them, after spending enough time in the city.

Boston is  
the opposite.

You can  
*feel it grow*,  
organically, going around  
trees and rivers.

It is old beauty  
covered with a  
thin coat of modernity.

It is so nice, so easy  
to get lost in its  
winding strets, its  
narrow roads.

It makes sense, then, why I love writing so much.

That's another thing about me that the study helped explain.



It explained why my memories work like this too.

I don't remember what my friends look like.

I don't remember what my hometown looks like.

Visualizing things that happen in my day-to-day life is hard too.

So I compensate.

I don't remember what my friends look like,

so I hang pictures of us in my room.

I don't remember what my hometown looks like,

so I have pictures saved on my phone.

And to remember what I do every day, I write.

I write about every time I explore Boston,

or every time I leave the city,

or every time I see a friend I haven't seen in a long time,

or every time I talk with someone for more than two hours,

or every time I see a good musical. *Everything*.

That's how I compensate. I turn memories to words. In this way, they  
are analyzed, are tackled, are made easier to remember.

That's the reason I write so much. I don't *just* like it.

It's *necessary*. Without writing, I forget.

Well, it explained *almost* all of my memories.

There's a few of my memories that don't work like that.

Events I can remember clearly,  
without having to write anything down.

Things I can't forget about.

Memories I can *see*.

I've turned all of my memories to words.

All of them, except for

memories

of

my

father.

He's behind the pulpit,



**a silhouette,**

**preaching that the gays,  
the atheists,  
the unbelievers,  
are all going to hell.**

He's driving the car,



**smoke,**

**asking me**

**about**

**my day,**

and I



**suffocate.**

I couldn't answer.

In my most vivid memory,  
my only vivid memory,

he is holding me  
by the collar **of my shirt.**

We are in the living room,

but I don't **see anything.**  
other than **him and me.**

He just found out

that I was **an atheist.**

He says:

*If you don't believe in **God,** **you can't stay at** home.*





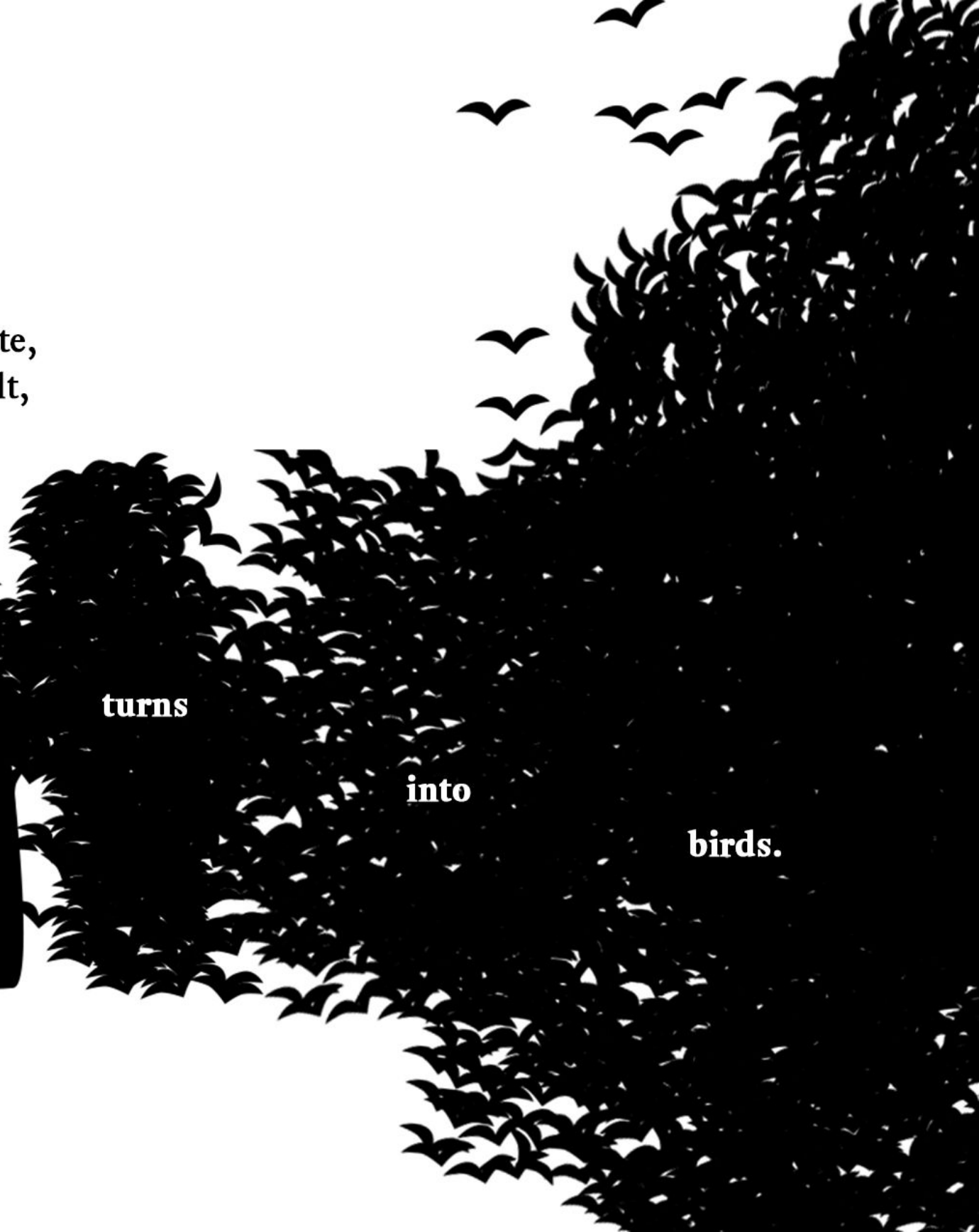
As he drags me out the front gate,  
and shoves me to the asphalt,

**he**

**turns**

**into**

**birds.**



**Thousands, and thousands, and thousands of birds.**



I am in Boston now.

There is an ocean between us.

It has been a year since I have last talked to him.

But he is still there. He is still in my memories.

He is still shadows.

So I compensate.

Him, too, I will turn into words.

To dad:

Three years ago, you learned that I was an atheist. It was the night of a church service. After you gave the sermon, someone at

I'll write. About the memories. About him.

church told you about my blog, where I wrote about how I didn't believe in God any more. Somehow, that made you snap. When you got home, you grabbed the collar of my shirt, dragged me out

I'll write about everything. *Everything.*

of the door, and shoved me through the front gate. You told me *if you don't believe in God, you can't stay at home*. You tossed me some clothes, threw out my wallet, and closed the doors. I felt cold, and

I will make his memory like all of my other ones.

I will turn the pastor to preaching.



I will turn the bigot to hatred.



I will turn him to words. Mere words.

If I can't forget him, then I will change my memories.

I will remember,

I know I didn't do anything wrong, and maybe that's part of what made me confused. I'm not going to ask for forgiveness for a sin I

and I will analyze,

didn't commit. You open the door to stare at me, and then you slap me. You tell me *if you're not going to be sorry for your mistakes,*

and I will *write*, goddamn it;

*then you should just leave home.* You slam the door on me. I'm pounding on your bedroom door, begging you to open it. My knees

I will relive every memory,

are aching from kneeling on the cold floor, my throat is sore from all the shouting, and my shirt is damp with the smell of tears and

every painful memory,

sweat. I'm crying out apologies that I didn't know I had in me. I'm sorry for not believing in God, I say. I'm sorry for writing all that

over, and over, and over,

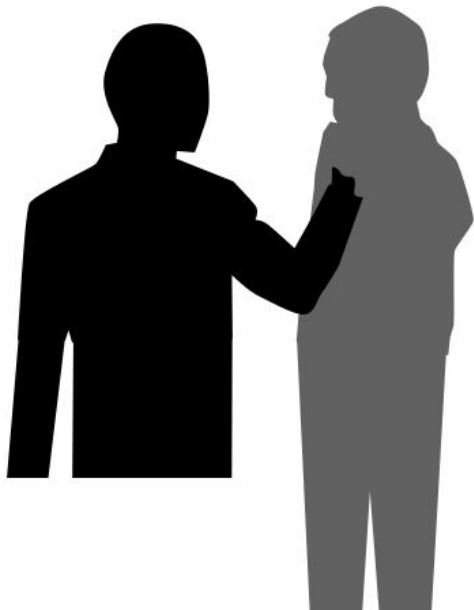
bad stuff on my blog, I say. I'm sorry for saying that I hated you and mom. I'll start believing again, really. Please let me stay, I'll

until I run out of words.

That's not what the memory looks like, yet. Not for a while.

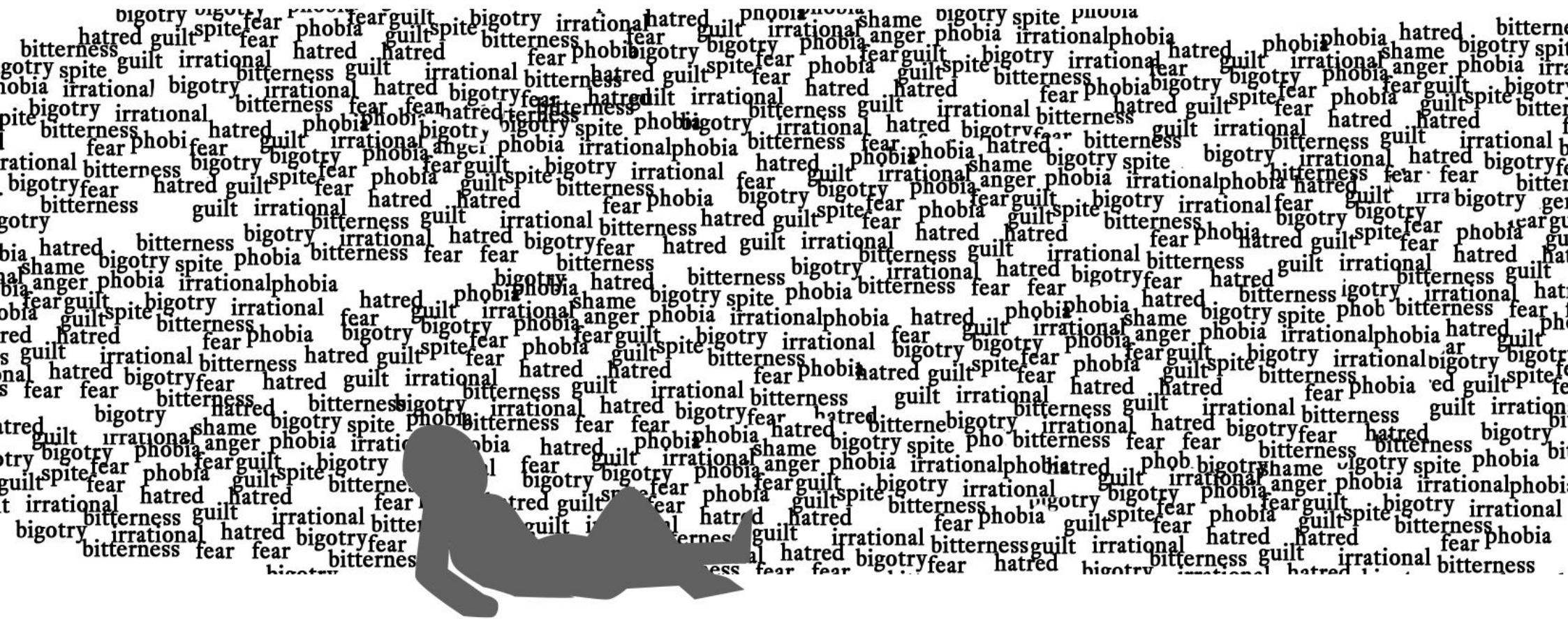
Not for a long, long while.

And the day will come,  
when my father lifts me by the collar,  
when he shoves me into asphalt,  
when he turns into birds,





he will do so



for the last time.