

## Part I: General Summation

Vikram Seth was born in Calcutta, India, in 1952 and educated at India's elite Doon School. After completing his early education in his homeland, Seth took his undergraduate degree in philosophy, politics, and economics from Oxford University. As a graduate student, Seth studied economics at Nanjing University then at Stanford University where he pursued a Ph.D. in economic demographics. While at Stanford he was a Wallace Stegner Fellow in Creative Writing during 1977-78 and worked as an editor for the Stanford University Press (11).

Given his rigorous and varied academic pursuits, it is surprising to note that, in addition, Seth has written five books of poems: *Mappings* (1980), *The Humble Administrator's Garden* (1985), *All You Who Sleep Tonight* (1990), *Three Chinese Poets* (1992), and *Beastly Tales* (1991); two novels: *A Suitable Boy* (1993) and *The Golden Gate* (1986), a novel in verse; *From Heaven Lake* (1983), a nonfictional account of his travels through Sinkiang and Tibet; and *Arion and the Dolphin*, a libretto.

The author of *The Golden Gate* obviously possesses an exceptionally broad range of interests and talents, as evidenced by his academic record. The depth and breadth of his vast intellect and knowledge are amply displayed throughout the text of this unique novel in verse.

*The Golden Gate* has gained notoriety from its unusual departure from the typical prose style of today's novels. Instead, Seth resurrects a formal, narrative verse form employing rhyming metered stanzas patterned after Pushkin's Eugene Onegin. Seth's novel is divided into thirteen chapters and contains 594 stanzas (including the dedication, acknowledgements, table of contents, and author's bio note) of 14 iambic tetrameter lines. Each stanza adheres to a specific rhyme scheme, AbAbCCddEffEgg, where the upper-case letters indicate feminine rhymes and lower-case letters represent masculine rhymes.

Overall, critics of *The Golden Gate* seem awed by Seth's agility as a writer of narrative verse. With one exception, even his strongest critics generally agree with Carol Iannone's comment that Seth's "vocabulary is rich and varied... [and] the language proves remarkably elastic and capable," as (54). Indeed, the language is extraordinary and noteworthy and ranges from distanced high artifice to mockery to sophisticated humor "with the seeming spontaneity, directness, and immediacy of free verse," as Bruce King observes, (231). John Hollander echoes and expands Bawer's praise:

The use of expertly controlled verse to give moral substance and extraordinary wit and plangency to a far from extraordinary tale is an astonishing achievement in its own right. (5)

Several critics applaud Gore Vidal's description of the book as "the great California novel." Bruce Bawer proclaims that it "is an extraordinarily accomplished work of narrative verse—one that has all the cardinal virtues of the genre, and has them in abundance," (77). Most critics agree, too, that the novel is technically a "splendid tour de force," as expressed by X.J. Kennedy, (1). Kennedy adds, "For pages, we forget Seth's incredible dexterity," (7). Line groupings and sentence structure are handled flexibly, even ingeniously. And most critics agree with Bawer that the story is "engaging, well-paced, and technically mesmerizing," (77), and that Seth imbues the story with a "marvelous wit." The author's playful fun-poking at himself, his poem, his hero, and the conventions of the verse to which he is scrupulously conforming is also soundly lauded. Bawer further raves that this is "one of the most delightful new books in recent memory," (77).

There is, in short, general agreement regarding Seth's exceptional cleverness, intellectual acuity, and technical expertise. Whereas the critics may agree on Seth's unusual control of the constraints of formal versification, this is the point where those critics who ventured beyond the technical aspects of the work part company. However, they often provide only cursory comments about the overall themes of peace, love, and friendship. In fact, for many critics, the novel's technical agility often seems to create such a strong sense of awe that it obscures or distracts from a critical reading of the text beyond its purely technical aspects. Iannone comments:

"Most of the critics who praised this book were entranced with its view of life as well as its technical virtuosity, while others may have been willing to overlook its view of life precisely because of its technical virtuosity." (56).

One brave critic actually dared to criticize Seth's technical abilities. Marjorie Perloff roundly criticizes Seth for his collection of cardboard cliché characters, affected allusions, and cutesy, meaningless rhymes. She cites stanza 2.49 as an example:

*Cut to dessert. An apt potation  
Of amaretto. They forgo  
The cinema for conversation  
And hand in hand they stroll below  
The fog-transfigured Sutro Tower  
A masted galleon at this hour,  
Adjourn for ice cream, rich and whole,  
At Tivoli's near Carl and Cole;  
Next for a drive—refreshing drama  
Of changing streets and changeless bay  
And, where the fog has cleared away,  
The exquisite bright panorama  
Of streetlights, sea-lights, starlight spread*

*Above, below, and overhead.*

Perloff finds his abrupt shifts from contemporary colloquialism ("Cut to dessert") to literary quaintness ("An apt potation") as "merely cute." Perloff says:

[It's] as if to say, Look reader, I know my way around poetic diction, I know (line 6) what a 'masted galleon' is and can compare it to the 'fog-transfigured Sutro Tower.' " (40)

Perloff also accuses the author of concocting rhymes for nothing more than filler:

What, for example, can ice cream be but 'rich and whole'? Diluted and made in sections? Thin and watery? Does the in-house reference to 'Carl and Cole' characterize the scene? And why is the drive the couple takes a 'refreshing drama,' except for the fact that 'drama' is about to rhyme with 'panorama.' (40)

After decades of loosely structured unmetered and unrhymed free verse, rhyme and meter have become the exception rather than the rule. Perloff says that "in the late twentieth century rhyming has become so exotically remote that we find the sheer utterance of like sounds cause for veneration," (37). Iannone suggests that in our "poetry-starved time" the current paucity of formal poetry in effect lowers the bar for measuring such works, thereby causing critics to lavish praise on what otherwise might only be considered what R.T. Smith calls, "light verse epic in a minor key," (96). Iannone states:

If ours were a versifying age like the Renaissance, when, as Virginia Woolf noted in another context, every man seemed capable of song or sonnet, it may be that the critics would have been more stringent in their assessment of Seth's prosodic efforts. (54)

Perloff further complains that "telling details," such as a character's reading material, fail to provide insights into the character because of major characterization inconsistencies. For example, the narrator relates that John "Enjoys his garden, likes to read/Eclectically from Mann to Bede" (1.3). According to Perloff, "nothing John ever says or does throughout the poem suggests that he would have so much as heard of the Venerable Bede, much less read Thomas Mann," (42).

Only a few critics dared to probe the minefield of such untouchable themes as peace, love, and acceptance by critiquing and questioning their morality and/or social value. Rowena Hill charges in her review that "the greatest flaw in the book [is] a flaw in values," (88). Hill centers her argument on the issue of homosexuality: " 'Make love not war' is much too simplistic an equation, and we object to the proportions in your scale of values, O California!" (89). Another critic, Makarand Paranjape calls this controversial issue, "one of the problems of the book," (68). He views Phil's marriage with Liz as restoring the norm for intimate relationships, and "Phil and Liz are the new unit which upholds the norms of the book," (69). Phil's bisexuality, however, remains "threatening" to the stability of that norm. Paranjape asks, "What if he were to take another male lover after marrying Liz?"

Despite the disparaging reviews and comments, there seems to be a consensus that Seth's novel brings renewed interest in rhymed and metered verse, which according to Perloff, is an "answer to our most basic yearning" for repetition and rhythm (37). Perloff credits Seth for calling "renewed attention to the role of sound in poetry," (46) and makes the claim that The Golden Gate's "great redeeming feature...is that it does send us back to Pushkin and to Byron—no mean feat!" (41).

## Part II: Critical Essay

Vikram Seth generally receives high critical praise for the swift pace of his narrative. Although many critics may disagree in their assessments of the story's various themes, and a few even quibble about his technical prowess, most laud him for the successful development of a fast-moving story that holds the reader's attention throughout this satirical look at Silicon Valley's yuppie lifestyle. The style with which Seth chooses to present his story is the perfect device to further satirize one pervading aspect of not just the yuppie lifestyle, but also of modern-day Americans' lives—the irascible, torrid pace. In many ways, this satire embraces nearly all Americans, not just a select group. Numerous elements point to this, both in the story's content and in Seth's style.

Writing a novel in verse rather than in prose on the surface appears to be little more than a unique presentation. Seth himself intervenes to explain his reasoning and states that he wants to try it just for the fun of it:

The truth is, I can't justify it.  
But as no shroud of critical terms  
Can save my corpse from boring worms,  
I may as well have fun and try it. (5.3, 9-12)

Although he admits he is doing it for fun, the impetus of passing time seems to actually be a stronger element that compels him toward it. He explains further in stanza 5.4 that the pressures of time are indeed a factor:

I would not, had I world and time  
To wait for reason, rhythm, rhyme  
To reassert themselves, but sadly  
The time is not remote when I  
Will not be here to wait. That's why. (10-14)

Time, then, plays an important role. The poet wishes for the return to favor of formal verse so he can indulge his preference to write in this form, but he can't wait that long for it to happen. Despite knowing that now may not be the right time, impatience compels him to write in the style he prefers, nonetheless. This attitude of impatience mirrors that of not only the main characters, but also the "I want it now" attitude of most Americans.

The sonnet stanzas in Seth's novel are not the common five-foot line length, but a condensed four-foot line. Using a condensed poetic form provides the author with several advantages, probably not the least of which is it enables a fast read. The short tetrameter line lengths allow a reader's eyes to skim more quickly. The stanzas resemble the common newspaper column width, which is structured specifically to enable the eye to skim downward rapidly and with ease. The shorter line length also allows the author the liberty of condensing thoughts and avoiding excess verbiage that would be necessary if the novel was written in standard prose.

Seth meticulously avoids using obscure symbols, metaphors, and convoluted syntax. Everything is designed to move the story at a swift pace, plus he aims for clarity. His words say exactly what he means, nothing more, nothing less. Seth does, however, deviate from this goal in one way by the lavish use of uncommon, polysyllabic words, thus hindering the reader from zipping non-stop through his novel at an Indy-500 pace. Ironically, Seth's fetish of using pretentious words at once hinders and facilitates the reader's ability to understand the text. If the reader takes the time to look up the unfamiliar words, the definitions provide a more exact interpretation. Thus, although the reader is slowed by an occasional consultation with Webster or Funk and Wagnall, the meaning is clarified and greatly enhanced. A nice trade-off, I'd say.

More importantly, the compact verse form and the tetrameter line length provide Seth with a vehicle to assault the reader directly in the eyes with words (so to speak) without using words directly! In other words, the swift pace and condensed form are part of the satire on American life. The reader actually participates in the author's satire while reading. The device is so obvious that the reader no doubt overlooks it, swept up in the accustomed accelerated pace of modern-day life, anxious to get to the end—or, to cut to the chase, to use a modern cliché appropriate to the novel's tone.

The two key elements that set this story into motion further evidences that this satire stretches well beyond a select group of Bay Area yuppies and encompasses most of contemporary American society: the frisbee and the personals ad, both of which are well-known and commonly used throughout the country.

Ads play a crucial role in both the story and in American life. They are responsible for dicing up our lives into 30- and 60-second sound bites. Seth captures this enigma by having his characters often speaking in glib, one-liners that resemble slick advertising copy. Jan, for example, when trying to convince John to take out a personals ad to solve his loneliness, sounds herself like an over-used ad. To John's exclamation of, "Me advertise? You must be kidding!" Jan responds, "Kiddo, I'm not. Just do my bidding. / Take out an ad. Right now. Today." How many times a day are we assailed by advertisers to "Do it! Today!"

Another pithy example is John's complaint to Jan about his ill-humored state of mind. John makes the complaint to her in a series of one liners, resulting in a stanza that reads like a personals ad. To wit:

"I'm young, employed, healthy, ambitious,  
Sound, solvent, self-made, self-possessed.  
But all my symptoms are pernicious.  
The Dow-Jones of my heart's depressed.  
The sunflower of my youth is wilting.  
The tower of my dreams is tilting.  
The zoom lens of my zest is blurred.  
The drama of my life's absurd.  
What is the root of my neurosis?  
I jog, eat brewer's yeast each day,  
And yet I feel life slip away.  
I wait your sapient diagnosis.  
I die! I faint! I fail! I sink!"  
"You need a lover, John, I think." (1.23)

Although Shelley might be less than pleased with the allusion here, the stanza mirrors advertisers' catchy, glossy phrases. Each phrase individually seems clever, but the next one tries to outdo the last. The result is about as effective as cutting and pasting ad copy from a magazine full of ads and combining them together into one large, overwhelming ad. Jan tops off—or one-ups—these ridiculous, frivolous one-liners with, "Don't put things off till it's too late. / You are the DJ of your fate" (1.24, 13-14). She updates an old cliché, but although her twist on it is new, it still sounds silly and too much like a cliché.

By contrast, Father O'Hare speaks in a rhythm more resembling common speech, with enjambed sentences flowing over multiple lines. Phil's dialogues also more closely follow colloquial speech patterns, especially those between Phil and his son Paul. Phil's more normal utterances reflect his resistance to trendy or faddish influences and his rejection of what the author considers as distorted, contemporary values. By no longer subscribing to a typical Bay Area lifestyle, Phil avoids the accelerated pace of life. Phil and Father O'Hare live a much slower pace of life compared to contemporary American life and, therefore, stand outside of the "norm" as it is presented in the story; and, in the story, both uphold the more traditional morals and values.

The critics' most commonly voiced complaint is the underdevelopment of characters. For example, R.T. Smith notes that "the characters are caricatures, albeit sparkling ones," and that some of "the people are silhouettes with simple outlines... [and] that the characters talk so much alike" (97). In her less-than-complimentary review, Marjorie Perloff complains that "the documentary detail [Seth] used throughout the 'novel' [simply engages in a bit of showing off], the characters remaining pure

paper dolls. And faceless paper dolls at that," (42). And Bruce King comments that "the characters are typical, even clichés ... emotionally flat, cartoon like" (225).

Rather than producing individuals, Seth produces shallow caricatures. In fact, Jan and Liz at times speak and act so similarly that it is difficult to distinguish one from the other. However, I submit that in satirizing the contemporary lifestyle, Seth chose purposefully to draw only sketchy characters. For one thing, this tactic facilitates the swift development of the story. For the sake of brevity, he must use a kind of shorthand version of people. By presenting stock characters, John, for example, is quickly recognized as a young Archie Bunker, and Mrs. Dorati is an aging June Cleaver. The author, then, need not waste time on character development.

Another reason for using stock characters is that individuals have personalities, but stock characters have images. What could be more appropriate when satirizing today's image-conscious population than to use stock characters? Madison Avenue strikes at the heart of our nature here, as well. One of our most predominant concerns is with image, from kids in kindergarten to corporations. A quick surf through the Internet will yield more image consultants than your hard disk has memory for. Seth's caricatures, thus, may more closely resemble modern Americans than we'd be comfortable to admit.

It is fitting, then, that an ad was responsible for bringing the main characters of this story together. The prerequisite for a successful ad is, of course, to create a desirable image, usually within 25 to 50 words. It was John's image condensed by Jan into 50-words-or less (39, to be exact) that appealed to Liz. In fact, it was actually only one word that drew Liz' attention:

... The word that drew  
Her gaze was "square." She'd often pondered  
Her own geometry, and wondered  
About a possible congruence. (2.34, 4-7)

Liz responded to the stock image of the word "square" as it is applied to men. Although it is questionable that John could actually fit this stock image (he may more aptly be described as "narrow," as in narrow-minded), the power of the image caused Liz draw comparisons as herself. In doing so, she mistakenly perceives that John has similar qualities to herself—a conclusion as flawed as the rocks that make up the San Andreas fault line that the characters live above.

Note her thoughts about John when first seeing him, instantly assessing his whole being merely from the clothes he is wearing:

"Handsome, all right, and what he's wearing  
Suggests he's just returned from church....  
Sound, solid, practical, and active,"  
Thinks Liz, "I find him quite attractive.  
Perhaps...." All this has been inferred  
Before the first substantive word  
Has passed between the two . . . (2.36, 3-9)

Liz' first impressions, of course, couldn't be further from the truth. Both Liz and John continue to pursue and expand their mutual relationship based on their separate, erroneous and rapidly perceived first impressions, which were largely formed before they even met. Indeed, both are guilty of succumbing to physical appearances—John, even more than Liz. His thoughts upon meeting her show a man easily swayed by good looks: "She's lovely," John thinks, almost staring. / They shake hands. John's heart gives a lurch" (2.36, 1-2). Later, as their "true" personalities chafe against the entrenched images each holds about the other, problems erupt, and eventually the relationship falls apart.

A stronger issue lurks behind this concern with image: time. John and Liz, not unlike many Americans, devote so much time and energy to their jobs that they lack the patience (disguised as lacking time) required to look for and develop friendships and intimate relationships. Ergo, the quick fix—place an ad for a partner. Ads are expedient and convenient to busy lifestyles everywhere, not just those in Silicon Valley or the Bay Area. Personals ads are a significant section of the classifieds in most major and minor newspapers throughout this country.

John and Liz's swift retreat to her bedroom after knowing each other for only a total of roughly 3 or 4 hours reflects moral values which grew out of the 1970's sexual revolution—a nationwide event. With the exception of Phil and Paul and the Dorati parents, each character's life seems to whiz by in a fuzzy blur. Within the space of a few pages (when eliminating the intervening section of Phil and Paul's outing in chapter 3), John and Liz' lives enter fast-forward from first meeting to moving in together. The progression happens so quickly that the reader barely has time to comprehend the rapidly ballooning relationship. Thus, when Liz and John move in together, like their hasty retreat to the bedroom, their decision to engage in mock matrimony lacks serious contemplation and succumbs more to impulse based on their images of the other. For the reader, it seems that their relationship couldn't possibly be mature enough for such a swift development. An hour of listening to the woes of callers to Dr. Laura will show this to be a common pattern of American lifestyles throughout the country—not just those in Silicon Valley.

Later, Liz attempts to race against her mother's "death clock" and enters into a hasty marriage and immediate pregnancy to produce a grandchild before her mother dies from cancer. Although the reader may perceive their actions to be impulsive, even irresponsible, the relationship between Liz and Phil had actually been marinating over the course of a year. Each had grown to know and understand the other's value systems, more thoroughly, certainly, than Liz and John had understood of each other's. Also, in contrast to Liz and John, Liz and Phil had met in nonthreatening circumstances. Consequently, neither had formed preconceived images of the other. Rather, their friendship and respect for each other grew as their lives came together through a natural progression of time and events. Because neither was concerned with creating or maintaining an

image (either of themselves or of the other), they each were free to experience the essence of the "real" person. Therefore, stripped of the pressures of coupling and of passion, they were capable of seeing the other more clearly.

Another subtle time-awareness device employed by Seth is to give all of the main human characters monosyllabic names: John, Jan, Liz, Phil, Paul, Ed, Sue, etc. Only the animals sport lengthier names, except for Jan's twin Siamese cats, Cuff and Link. However, because these two are a pair, their names are also linked (pardon the pun) and, thus, forming an inseparable three-syllable moniker for the pair. Therefore, it takes longer to say or read their names because they are usually read in tandem. The longer names, in contrast to the monosyllabic names, highlight that the animals live in a different time frame. Unlike humans, animals are inextricably linked to nature; thus, they live in "real time," not sped-up human time.

Seth also uses the pets as foils to their human owners in several ways. The animals he chooses provide a distinct contrast to the hurried lifestyles of their owners. Mature cats, in particular, are known for their indulgence in more leisurely activities, such as stretching and napping frequently. Only fright will send a mature, self-satisfied cat scurrying. And, certainly the slow lumbering iguana also emphasizes the rapid pace of human time, especially that of an advertising professional—the iguana's owner. And Liz' profession as a lawyer is known for its high-pressure, rapid-fire pace.

Also, in contrast to his human characters, Seth provides more extensive detail when developing the animals' personalities, especially those of Charlemagne and Schwarzenegger. The animals are presented through specific actions or individual characteristics, unlike the human characters who are revealed almost exclusively through dialogue. Any character, whether human or animal, is perceived more clearly by the reader through specific actions, facial expressions, and body language. Seth, however, denies us these kinds of insights when developing his human characters. On the other hand, Swartzenegger's very animal-like reactions and instinctual distrust and cowardice comes through quite succinctly from the following descriptions:

The warty beast observes Ed coldly,  
Stares at the green and mottled pear  
He proffers. Noisily and boldly  
He crawls toward him, unaware  
Of the loose leash that Ed is holding.  
Ed slips it round him, gently scolding:  
"Now watch that dewla—mind those spines—"  
But Schwarzenegger undermines  
All of Ed's efforts at persuasion  
—By jerking, clawing—until he  
Obtains his avocado. "We  
Are now prepared for an invasion  
Of our quiescent neighborhood.  
You want a walk? ... (The head bobs.) ... Good!" (4.36)

And from 4.43:

At night, Ed brings in his iguana.  
Phil eyes him warily, while he  
Eyes Philip just as warily.  
Phil tries to bribe him. A banana?  
The monster bloats his jowls at this,  
Emitting his hoarse gular hiss. (9-14)

These passages portray the beast in all of his animal essence. The iguana's peculiar actions reveal him unmistakably as an animal, but also as an individual. The contrast between humans and animals can more clearly be seen in passage 10.10, which describes the Dorati's and their guests after Thanksgiving dinner.

Two hours later, spent and bloated,  
Like pythons who have swallowed pigs,  
All in the household are devoted  
To groaning gently, after swigs,  
"What's on TV?" and reminiscing  
About old times, friends who are missing,  
And movies shot when Ed was two  
Of Liz admiring baby Sue.  
At last they settle down to viewing  
That blood sport, football—in its way  
Almost as vicious as croquet—  
While Charlemagne's contented mewing  
(Tail across paws, and head atilt)  
Blends with the coffee's bubbling lilt.

Note how the humans are generalized and presented as a unified group, further blurring their individualities. But, in the same stanza, Seth's lens focuses on only one animal, Charlemagne (lines 12-14) and shows him in a very distinct pose, clearly reflecting his attitude. Amusingly, Seth even compares the humans to animals, and he makes this comparison when the

humans are relaxed and recovered from overeating. In other words, they most resemble their animal cousins when the pace of their lives is altered from its usual hurried pace. Because the animals are presented by their own peculiar actions, by the end of the story, they seem to stand out more boldly and individually than do the humans.

For all of their youth, Seth's main characters, especially John and Jan, act as though they are going through a midlife crises 20 years too early. Most of the characters are in the mid-twenties, but they experience the passage of time in a contracted form normally identified with people more than 40 or 50 years old. John and Jan are only a few years out of college, busy, and involved with other people and activities, yet John "feels an urgent riptide drawing/Him far out, where, caught in the kelp/Of loneliness, he cries for help" (1.2, 12-14). Wallowing in his loneliness and depression, he complains to himself "I jog, eat brewer's yeast each day, / And yet I feel life slip away" (1.23, 10-11). Jan then echoes and exaggerates his paranoia of passing time by urging him to not "put things off till it's too late" (1.24, 13) as she encourages him to find a lover. She continues in this vein, adding to John's angst:

Think of yourself a few year later,  
Possessing, as the years go on,  
Less prepossessing vital data;  
Love handles ... ("Thanks a lot," says John.)  
... Receding ... (John is getting nervous:  
"More rice? I wonder when they'll serve us.")  
... Hairline ... ("Funny taste, this tea."  
He sips at it distractedly.)  
... Lonely and lost, sans love, sans lover,  
Too much to drink last night . . . (1.25, 1-10)

While trying to convince John of the need to place a single's ad, she says:

"Don't bank too much on youth. Your rookie  
Season is drawing to an end.  
John, things we would—when young—not think of,  
Start to make sense when, on the brink of  
Thirtydom, we pause to scan  
What salves and salads cannot ban,  
The earliest furrows on our faces,  
The loneliness within our souls,  
Our febrile clawing for mean goals,  
Our programmed cockfights and rat races,  
Our dreary dignity, false pride,  
And hearts stored in formaldehyde. (1.35)

Jan's sermonizing more resembles an aging parent trying to impress on a wayward offspring the horrors of passing time, rather than a 26-year old ex-girlfriend trying to diagnose a friend's source of anxiety. Because people in their mid-twenties are still relatively young, they tend to view themselves as immortal. Jan and John's sense of fleeting time and youth's misuse of time seem grossly exaggerated and premature. However, these two characters' warped sense of time parodies our own fast-forwarded time pace.

And finally, one of the more clever clues used that point this satire directly at ourselves is found at the very beginning of Seth's novel in verse—the invocation to the Muse: "To make a start more swift than weighty, / Hail Muse ..." (1.1, 1-2). The author not only uses a condensed sonnet form, he also takes the liberty of condensing the traditional invocation. We're left with no doubt why he's taken this liberty because he tells us: Time is of the essence. Indeed, the passage of time is a pervading and dominant force throughout this book. But the modern reader is so thoroughly indoctrinated into a lifestyle of hemorrhaging time that recognition of the many devices Seth uses to call our attention to living life at the bleeding edge probably eludes most of our notice.

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