



JUSTICE — INJUSTICE

CAUSTIC FROLIC

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JUSTICE/INJUSTICE

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Although she had long intended to go to school for wildlife biology, **CAITLIN HACKETT** wound up studying fine art at Pratt Institute, where she graduated with her BFA from the Fine Art department. Although she now lives and works in Oakland, CA, it is the remote mountains and oceans of her childhood that echo in her work, her love for the natural world and fear for its loss. As humanity encroaches ever further upon the remnants of wilderness left in the world, she hopes to allow some sense of wilderness to encroach back upon those people who view her work.

Author, freelance writer, and environmentalist **DAN LINEHAN** recently returned from a year and a half in Argentina, where he wrote about wildlife and environmental issues and worked on his novel, *The Princess of the Bottom of the World*. The novel is based on his real-life adventures in Antarctica and the surrounding regions. For far too long, facts and science haven't been winning the climate battle. With his novel, he hopes to reach the minds of people by first getting through to their hearts.

ASHLEY BRADLEY is a first year doctoral student in the Joint Program in English and Education at the University of Michigan. She is interested in studying black girlhood in the literary imagination. Prior to pursuing her degree, Ashley was a full-time teacher of middle and high school English.

MYKA E. OWENS is an emerging screenwriter, author, actor, and poet with several produced projects and published pieces. His work has been published in *Axis Magazine* and *Miambiance Magazine*, along with a film he wrote and directed in 2018, which screened at the Borscht Corp Film Festival, among others. He is currently applying to NYU Tisch for Dramatic Writing and resides in South Florida as a homeless valet attendant.

After a music career with the electro-clash band EMMA PEAL, **VINCENT PEAL** now dedicates his energies to the visual realm. He has produced a number of super 8 video clips in New York, London, and Berlin, as well as a documentary about outcasts living in Brussels. His photos of the Bombay slums and pollution on West Africa's beaches were selected for the World Expo 2010 in Shanghai in the "World Water Pavilion." He recently released his second photobook, entitled *World News*.

RCA O'NEAL has previously been published in *Catamaran Literary Reader* and *Chicago Quarterly Review*. Aside from writing, he also composes music in the baroque style, and plays the baroque violin and harpsichord.

A disciple of the experimental humanities and freelance historian, **MATTHEW DISCHNER's** writings mix his passion for poetry, deep historical knowledge, and obsession with the natural world. A graduate of NYU's recently transformed Draper Program, Matthew splits his time between the Virginia wine industry and working as a tutor and college admissions coach. You can read his other works at indulgencezine.com.

In 1984 **J. DAVID LISS** received an MFA from Brooklyn College. Trained in writing and inclined to politics, he became a speechwriter, then a lobbyist. In the past 30 years, Liss has worked in corporate, academic, and healthcare centers and all his work has been touched by literature (he likes to think). His prose has been published in *Inwood Indiana Press*, *The MacGuffin*, *Lake Effect*, *Between the Lines*, *Adelaide*, and others. His poetry has appeared in *The Naugatuck River Review*, *Fifth Wednesday Journal*, *Blood and Thunder*, *Felan*, *Euphony*, *Poetry Quarterly*, and others.

NOMADECOLLAGE (AKA JERONIMO BATISTA ROSA CHAVEIRO) was born in Belgium, but resides in Portugal. He is an artist who lives through the paper. He practiced this art for several years and has already exhibited his works in several Belgian and Portuguese galleries. He loves meeting people from other worlds than his, debating and exchanging points of view. If he had to define his art, he would say that he is a surrealist but always confronting through reality. He views collage as a window open to the world, a major means of expression and an art full of surprises.

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MARK HOWARD is a graduate student in Politics and History of Consciousness at the University of California, Santa Cruz. He holds an undergraduate degree in Philosophy from Macquarie University, and a Masters in International Relations Theory from the London School of Economics. His research concerns the epistemological problems associated with recognizing and responding to historically significant change in the present, and is grounded in Political Theory, Political Economy, and Political Theology.

SIGAL BEN-DAVID is a graduate of Camera Obscura School of Art in Tel-Aviv, Israel, where she majored in Photography, and was a Digital Media student at the Kibbutzim College of Education, Technology, and the Arts. Ben-David's work attempts to visually articulate the role of objects in constructing and deconstructing the narratives around which we organize our lives, questioning the ways in which we form our social and political identity.

Editor's Note

As I read over the current issue of *Caustic Frolic*, I find myself floored by the variety of authors, their art, their testimonials, and the research we've been entrusted to exhibit within such an important, relevant issue.

The theme for Fall 2019 is "Justice/Injustice." In early discussions, it was suggested that one term would do: justice or injustice. However, the polarity between each concept felt limiting to our potential contributors. Justice, as its popularly understood, suggests a triumph, a moral victory over its polar opposite, the offending injustice. To call for submissions on justice alone would feel like an erasure; justice defined as the absence of injustice.

As we all know, injustice will persist in some form *ad infinitum*. For this issue of the journal, we've chosen to explore how life continues with this knowledge. To what degree do we temper expectations while struggling in the pursuit of justice? Can justice be acquired in small and large ways? For the benefit of all, at the expense of a few? How do we celebrate justice when the possibility for injustice remains inevitable?

Our contributors have applied these questions to topics ranging from climate change to literature, the global refugee crisis to over-policing, child abuse to gender stereotypes, and so on. As such, I ask readers to proceed with caution, as **some content may be potentially distressing**.

Being that the scope of any one publication is limited, I encourage our readers to research and engage with topics of justice/injustice beyond the scope of this issue. The crisis in Kashmir. The protests in Hong Kong. Governmental accountability and the U.S. impeachment hearings.

These topics and more deserve our attention.

- Jacob Anthony Moniz
Editor-in-Chief



Carrying Capacity

by TOR STRAND

There was a woman sketching mountains,
her feet wadding in rings of waves.

She moved like a silver print and I couldn't help
but ask her story, and she said:

empanada and Patagonia, said rain forest and Santiago—
we cook our own food and do maid work.

Then her hand drew the long way
home to the Andes as she said visa

and the luck of the draw who go north, who fly-fish,
like her partner now, a breath away, tossing out neon

line in loops, his toes flexing over the woodrot and rust.
Life is a wet surface.

Her blonde hair through a needle-broke sun,
how voices carry over water—

The Rise and Fall of Prince Charming

BY MARK AXELROD-SOKOLOV

Not too long ago, but sometime after the break up, Malarkey happened to be in Paris for a writer's conference. He generally avoided writers' conferences because they tended to be a bit too pretentious for Malarkey, what with everyone there thinking he or she was a better writer than everyone else who was there thinking he or she was a better writer than everyone else who was there *cacoethes scribendi*. That said, Malarkey went to Paris because Citrus City College paid for his flight, food, and registration, so why not? Malarkey planned on staying with an old Oxford chum who had moved from Brooklyn to Paris, along with a Harvard law degree and a fluency in French and Spanish that had helped him practice immigration law in the new country. One evening, Malarkey decided to go out on his own to a brasserie he often frequented when he was himself a student at Oxford, when taking weekenders to Paris to carouse oftentimes ended up somewhere near the Moulin Rouge which was a fashionable place to end up. Just why Malarkey wound up near the Moulin Rouge in those days is open to the Reader's speculation, but back to the brasserie.

The brasserie wasn't just any brasserie, but the famous Le Procope, one of the oldest restaurants not only in Paris, but in the world. At one time, its clientele included, but wasn't limited to, such notables as: Rousseau and Voltaire (though not at the same time), Diderot, Franklin and Jefferson (yes, those two), Robespierre, Danton and Marat, not to mention Musset, George Sand, and Chopin *ad astra*. So, it didn't surprise Malarkey when he saw, sitting by himself at a table for two, nursing a brandy, none other than Prince Charming. From a distance, it appeared to Malarkey the Prince had seen better days, since he didn't look like the Prince Charming of olde. The swaggering, bon vivant Prince Charming who he was known to be.

"Prince," Malarkey said enthusiastically.

The Prince slowly looked up and immediately recognized Malarkey from those halcyons, yet frenetic, Oxonian days, feigned a smile as he and Malarkey exchanged a salutatory hug.

As he sat down, what immediately struck Malarkey was the Prince's countenance. There he sat a once tall and regal man, now bent, almost completely gray, balding in the worst places, haggard, wearing a frayed frieze coat adorned with tarnished bronze buttons. The Prince's features had undergone a major change since Malarkey saw him last in Oxford, 1968 and approaching old age (even for a fictional character), time had time enough to set its mark on him. His eyes had an odd look about them, no longer dashing bright, they now took on an almost glaucoma aura about them. His whole being, his movements, which were

at one time slow, at another abrupt and disconnected, his often slurred, benumbed manner of speaking, all showed a kind of utter exhaustion, a quiet and secret dejection, a resigned realization, which was very different from the half-assumed melancholy he had affected once upon a time when full of hope and constant vanity and a willingness, nay eagerness, to bed whomever he wished was his stock in trade. In an attempt to get the Prince to brighten up, Malarkey offered the Prince a Gitanes, which he politely rejected with a wave of his hand.

"I do not smoke anymore. Too many centuries of smoking have rendered the old lungs old."

Malarkey too didn't smoke, but when he visited Paris he often brandished a pack of Gitanes or Gauloises as a kind of requisite passport for being a part of Paris. Malarkey truly wanted to cheer up his old friend, whose countenance clearly needed it. The Prince was either staring at the table or at his brandy when Malarkey finally asked, "So, Prince. Fill me in on what's been going on in your life. Still chasing skirts, no?"

The Prince looked up either from his brandy or the table and spoke in a way that somewhat shocked Malarkey with its frankness.

"Please, Malarkey, just call me Day. I'm world weary of the whole Prince Charming thing," then he took another sip of brandy. "I am suffering from... what is the word in German?"

"Weltschmerz?"

"Yes, Weltschmerz." He paused for a moment as if gathering his thoughts. "You know all of this Charming business started soon after Perrault published that tale of me and Aurora. You remember that?"

Malarkey nodded.

"Then you remember after she woke up she looked at me and said, 'Est-ce vous, mon prince? Vous vous êtes bien fait attendre?'"

Again, Malarkey nodded.

"That was the exact point when my life changed completely because Perrault also wrote, 'Le Prince charmé de ces paroles ne savait comment lui témoigner sa joie.' What was he thinking?"

"So what?" Malarkey asked.

"So what! Do you not see! It was I who was being charmed, not who was being charming. That's French 101. Charmé is not charmant! That is when the whole nightmare of becoming Prince Charming began. Aurora and I got married, but one thing led to another and, after a while, we separated and finally divorced."

"What happened?"

"Usual thing. She got pregnant, had a miscarriage, got tired of the routine, had an affair with Lancelot, dumped him. You know the story."

“Lancelot! Are you kidding?”

“No. He and I have resolved that, but she got fifty percent of everything. Even the royalties from Perrault’s tale and, of course, those Disney attorneys screwed me over royally. Attorneys! Fous-moi le camp, ordure!”

“Me?”

“No, attorneys.” He took another sip of brandy. “Anyway, she got fifty percent of my kingdom and I eventually had to start dating again. Me! And that is precisely when this whole Prince Charming ruse began. I have no idea how that turned into me being Prince Charming since I was the one who was charmed and not Aurora. But that fuck up by Perrault has haunted me for centuries because every woman I have ever dated since then has constantly been looking for me, Prince Charming, even though I am not that person. Being Prince Charming has been an untoward burden on me since how could I ever meet some woman’s fantasies of who I am supposed to be when I am not that person at all? N’est-ce pas?”

Prince took another sip of brandy.

“After Lancelot and I made amends, I once had a similar discussion with him and he was equally pissed off with the whole white knight fiasco. ‘Even white stallions have shit stains on their asses,’ he once said to me. He got so fed up with the whole white knight in shining armor bullshit, he sold his white horse, scrapped the armor and decided to become a winemaker.”

“Wow. Really? Where?”

“Burgundy, I think. Côte de Nuits. But how is a guy supposed to compete with the image they have created of me? Charmé not charmant.” He downed the rest of his brandy, then signaled to the waiter for yet one more.

Needless to say, the Prince was more than a bit animated. One could see the whole Prince Charming thing was getting to him, more than Malarkey could have ever known and as he continued drinking he also began to repeat himself with and not without slurring a bit. He ordered an absinthe and continued.

“Let me, let me give an example. As I said, I, I, I was the one charmed and not charming. The phrase is clear and every language on the planet has misconstrued the line to make me the charming one. You can see how event- eventually one could assume that might be, be misanthropic. I mean why should I, moi, I have had to suffer all these centuries because people cannot understand French!?”

“Hmmm, same holds for English. Do you think it was an error in translation?”

To which the Prince gave Malarkey a chin flick at the same time the absinthe was delivered.

“How does one mis-mistake reading charmed for charming? Even an American should get that, no?”

“Don’t look at me. I’m Irish, remember?”

There was a long silence as Prince toyed with the silverware on the table before he asked:

“So, tell me Malarkey, how is your love life? As I recall, you were trying to bed a Persian Princess at Oxford, n’est-ce pas?”

“Got to first base, but never got to home plate.”

Then Malarkey gave Day a kind of abridged version of his life before, during and after Liliana and how he had to resort to dating sites in order to meet anyone. But with the mention of the phrase “dating sites,” the Prince became agitated again.

“There! There! Fucking dating sites!” he screamed so loudly the portrait of Robespierre blinked.

“Calm down,” Malarkey said. “Here, finish your brandy” which he did.

“J’en ai plein le cul!” he said.

“Tired of what...exactly?”

“They’re to blame for my going to seed, for losing my hair, for the dullness in my eyes.”

“Who’s to blame?”

“The women on those sites!”

And then Prince went on another rant. He was beginning to be repetitive if not redundant, but Malarkey let him vent.

“Mais pourquoi?”

“Pourquoi! I will tell you pourquoi. You tell me how oft, often you read on one of those profiles, profiles where a woman wants to find her ‘Prince Charming!’ How can anyone age gra-gracefully with that type of pressure. Sacré bleu!” He swallowed the absinthe. “And what is the fucking deal with this ‘is chivalry dead’ nonsense?” Do any of these women know where the term came from? *Chevalerie*; horse soldiery! For men on horses! It is a poetic invention. Do they think it is just for opening car doors and pulling out table chairs! Do they really expect men to act like an ideal knight, courageous, honorable, courteous, with a willingness to help the impoverished! Are they fucking stupid!?”

Needless to say, the Prince, er Day, had a wee bit too much absinthe and to say he was beside himself would have been a gross understatement. Obviously, over three centuries time takes a toll on one’s appearance, but Malarkey had serious concerns about his friend’s well-being.

“Far be it from me,” Malarkey began, “to question how you’re feeling and the reasons for it, but you really need to get yourself together. Have you tried therapy?”

He nodded.

“Oui, I am on Flexor and Wellbutrin. Supposed to lighten my mood.”

“And?”

“And does it look like my mood has lightened to you?”

“Well, no, but I’m...”

“Right. No.”

The waiter brought Day yet another brandy that he threw back at once.

“Whoa, Prince. Ease up on the Courvoisier. Are you driving?”

“Uber.”

“Good idea.”

Then there was another long silence.

“Is there anything I can do to help?” Malarkey asked.

“Malarkey, I appreciate your offer, but there is only one thing that would make my life easier.”

“What’s that?”

“If every woman would scrap the idea that any man can be a Prince Charming. That would make my life inconceivably easier.”

Knowing that was about as likely as the French sanctioning the baking of baguettes, Malarkey chatted a bit more before he said he had to leave. He didn’t really have to leave, but it was evident that nothing he could do or say was going to get Day out of his fairytale funk.



Repositioned

BY MARK GENS

Inkjet prints on acetate and mylar, wrapper. 15.25 x 14.75 inches.

Life Choices

by JULIA SNYDER

Is it fair to hold all men accountable for the sins of my father?
because of my parents' marriage to swear off marriage
because I don't want to relive my mother's life
so blessed with a husband with a stable job to provide
and six kids to birth and love and discipline
and a social life to maintain
and cleaning
and cooking
and laundry
for eight people
Is it fair to apply what I've seen to my future?
Is no relationship repeated?
I ask myself every summer
why ever do people have kids?

on the night you were angry

by FIONA HABORAK

In the reflective glass, you spy a distorted version of yourself. An agitated woman stares back. So, you shrink a little further into yourself, shoulders hunched to avoid attention. Dark circles hang under your eyes far heavier than your Burlington bag bargain find. Cheap, purple earbuds jostle with every stop announced over the intercom. You sigh and shuffle closer to the sliding doors to make for a swift exit.

You **must** be tired of the songs they write about girls: the ones you will never be. You're drowning in your oversized sweater, your woolen suit of armor.

You're tired of the way these young Bushwick men masquerade as old poets while downing their Jack to scribble down the cliché (re: furiously type in a beatnik Starbucks with a Venti drink from hell, a game of wannabe pretend) while the ash trickles from their waning cigarettes.

You're tired of the wolves that view all women as Aphrodite fresh out of the bath: dripping wet and curvy, but not too curvy. The ideal Salomé must always show her hungry ribs.

These degenerates focus on their rejection and anger when you waltz on by their lives and starved eyes despite only being a stranger on the subway, on the street, in the stores where you can't get a moment's peace. It's exhausting to scurry home, glancing over your shoulder every thirty seconds, taking a different path for your safety, because it's your fault for wearing heels, for showing your calves in your skirt, for taking up too much space.

You don't dream of being a muse, you dream of being regarded as a person. After you bolt your door shut, you chuck your purse onto the overstuffed sofa. With a heavy sigh, you collapse, but try your best not to cry.

Tired, darling, doesn't even begin to describe it.

Lost Words and Silenced Voices: An Interview with Jessica Stilling on *The Beekeeper's Daughter*

The relationship between Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes is something of literary lore: the passionate yet tumultuous marriage, his cheating, her suicide, his “misplacement” of her unpublished writing after her death. It’s a myth told and retold, cemented as a bit of fundamental literary history. Yet within the context of literature, the last fragment of their story seems especially troubling. With his final betrayal, Hughes robbed Plath of control over her work, her legacy. He silenced her.

*It’s hard not to think about this act of injustice when reading Jessica Stilling’s forthcoming novel, *The Beekeeper’s Daughter*. The novel imagines Plath’s life in the year or so leading up to her suicide, as well as a parallel character in the present day, Lorelei. As the fictionalized Sylvia grapples with motherhood, mental illness, and loneliness in London, Lorelei uncovers her mother’s lost diary nearly a year after she killed herself, while also dealing with the aftermath of her husband’s affair. In interweaving the life of a historical figure with that of a fictional character, the narrative insists upon the ways in which mental illness, and its rip-pling effects, impacts countless women. These are historical truths often unspoken; the resulting silence is devastating.*

Lost words haunt Stilling’s novel. The stories Sylvia Plath never wrote, the things Lorelei’s mother Maggie never said to her: their absence is essential. It foregrounds the layered injustice of silencing “madwomen” with regard to institutionalization, societal exclusion, and the general and thorough erasure of their voices from history. These are issues that can no longer be ignored. There must be space for such voices to speak. For their stories to exist. Ultimately, Stilling’s novel is aware of this need, acting as a needle poking the silence that has been ballooning for decades.

The following is an interview with the author on the process of writing her novel and several of its themes, including voiceless women, the relationship between art and pain, and mental illness.

- Sarah Jane Weill

...

During the process of writing the novel, how conscious were you of addressing the literary injustice of Ted Hughes effectively silencing Sylvia Plath by “losing” unpublished work after she died? Was this one of your initial motivations in deciding to write the book?

Yes, it was. I thought about writing this book for almost 12 years. The first time I read *The Bell Jar* as an adult, I really felt like this story isn’t finished. I wanted to finish it. Then when I was writing about Sylvia and Esther, I really felt like I was channeling Plath. I was trying to give voices to these characters. Especially because there were other stories Plath wrote about Esther, [which we no longer have], I felt that these stories were supposed to be written in some way. This was really my initial motivation.

I wanted to give each of these women a voice. Not just Sylvia herself but Maggie, Lorelei’s mother, who also deals with mental illness and institutionalization; that’s why I decided to give her journal entries, to give her a voice. This story [of the voiceless “madwoman”] still exists today. That was why I wrote about Lorelei, too, [not just Sylvia,] I wanted to have someone in the present-day dealing with these issues.

The novel focuses a lot on the ethics of reading and/or publishing the stories of dead, “madwomen.” How is allowing space for these habitually ignored voices to be heard and read an act of justice? At what point does this become an act of violation or exploitation?

When it comes to Sylvia Plath, the idea of being silenced and exploited hits really close to home. It has been widely reported that her husband Ted Hughes “lost” the manuscript of at least one novel that she was working on at the time of her death. It’s believed that this manuscript painted him and Assia [Wevill], the woman he cheated with and then married after Plath’s death, in a bad light.

Ted always claimed that the manuscript and other journals of Plath’s were lost, but there has been much speculation. After I read *The Bell Jar*, I felt like we had been robbed of so much great writing due to Plath’s death, and I wondered a lot about what stories she would have told if she’d had the time.

As for exploitation, after her death, Ted made a lot of money off of her work. He even published a compilation of stories and journal entries, first drafts of essays, etc., that Plath might never have wanted to get out called *Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams*. Because he was still technically her husband when she died, he inherited the rights to all her work and did grow quite rich off of it.

Does this distinction matter when the stories belong to a public figure, for example, Sylvia Plath, versus a private one like Lorelei's mother?

There's definitely a difference between a public and a private figure. Public figures at least have some intention of being published and heard, whereas a private journal might never want to see the light of day. Plath wanted to be heard, and that's why she tried so hard to get her work out there. Lorelei does discover and read her mother's journal, but she never publishes it. But was it right for Lorelei to read her mother's journal? That does depend on who you ask.

Another theme of the novel is the idea that great art often comes from pain or hardship. Is it more that the process of creation is the best way to productively work through pain? Or that art is most affective when it taps into a rich source of emotion? Both?

Yes, definitely, artists use their work to process pain, but more than that, I think that pain resonates with people, and it makes better art. I think that stories (and other forms of art) that are compelling, that truly last are about pain. Think about two stories. One has a happy ending, and one has a sad one. Which one really resonates with you after you put it down? Which one do you hold in your hand and wish it had gone differently?

Does this notion apply to all kinds of pain? Is there ever a type of pain that shouldn't be used to create art? Does it matter who is using whose pain to create such art?

I don't know if there's ever a pain that shouldn't be used to create art. If someone feels compelled to tell his or her story (in any form of art), then that shouldn't be a problem. But I think that obviously, people shouldn't try to steal the pain of others. It's best to consider one's own experience instead of the experience of other cultures or identities.

Historically speaking, of course, there's a certain institutional injustice with regard to the treatment (medical, societal, etc.) of mentally ill women. To what degree does this injustice affect the lives of the "madwomen" in the novel?

Sylvia Plath saw this injustice much too clearly. She was put away for quite a long time after her first mental breakdown and then given electroshock. She wrote about the experience quite a lot, saying that it was always painful; she was always afraid of it. But it was also an issue of class. She wasn't wealthy. Her family was lower

middle-class, her father passed away when she was ten years old, and her mother worked really hard to give her a decent life. When she was first sent to a mental health facility, it was dirty and scary, and it was only later, when the author Olive Prouty started footing the bill for her care, that she was taken to a nice facility. I try to show this with Maggie, as well. Lorelei's family also does not have much money, and Lorelei talks about the scary places her mother ended up.

With regard to the mythic idea of the Lorelei figure, to what degree is this “stealer of men” an agent of injustice? Does this figure deserve any kind of justice herself?

As it states in the beginning of the novel, the name Lorelei comes from a Plath poem of the same name. This issue of a stealer of men was definitely close to Plath's own heart as her husband left her for his mistress. “That woman,” as Plath calls her in the book, never using her name, is someone to be feared: someone stronger than herself, who has won something, or taken something, from her. But I tried to make Theo's mistress, Heather, more sympathetic. Not only because of her death, but while I was writing, I wanted to stay away from jilted wife tropes since we already had so much of that with Plath's own story. The stealer of men, the jilter of wives, definitely deserves our sympathy as well. Heather is a victim in this too. She deserves justice. That's why I made her someone who was close to Lorelei. I didn't want to villainize her. I could write a story about a terrible cheating husband, or I can write a story that gets into the human of it. Relationships are complicated, and to say that one person “stole” another person from them can be very controlling in nature, even if it feels that way.

What kinds of research went into the process of writing this novel? Specifically, with Sylvia Plath, both her writing and her private life? And with the history of treating mental illness, including electroshock therapy and institutionalization?

There was definitely a lot of research done for this book. I started by re-reading everything Plath wrote: *Colossus*, *Ariel*, *The Bell Jar*, as well as her letters and journals. I also went to Smith and looked at her papers there. I traveled to London early on in the writing of the first draft and saw where she lived with Ted and also the house in Camden, Yeats' House, where she lived and died. In addition, I read many Plath biographies, many focusing on her young life and her mental illness, but others that focus on Sylvia and Ted's marriage.

I also did extensive research on electroshock and what it meant to be institutionalized in the 1950s and early '60s. I spoke with some women who were at institutions like the one Plath was in. My husband's grandma knew a woman who'd been institutionalized in the 1950s; I talked to her and another woman who had a similar

story. Both of them had been institutionalized multiple times. We talked a lot about the changes between the 1950s and contemporary times around institutionalization. Something that was really interesting to learn, for me, was that even when they talked about the injustices they had experienced and the problems with institutionalization, they were still grateful for the help. Plath felt the same way. She wanted treatment because she knew it would be more helpful than being on her own.

Both the women I talked to agreed that the main problem was that in the 1950s, there was this terrible stigma. They felt so ashamed of going into the institutions; their families felt ashamed. And the personal treatment they received in the institutions was very poor. For example, they would receive these snarky comments by the nurses. They'd say things like, why don't you just stop acting crazy, awful things like that. The attitude towards these women was just you're bad, so we're putting you away. Both women agree that today, the way professional staff treats people inside, as well as the stigma around the institutionalization in general, has gotten much better. It seems like there's been this atmospheric shift: now it's okay to ask for help.

One of the women I spoke with had had electroshock in her early 20s. She said it makes everything really fuzzy; it takes a long time to become yourself again. And it's not just this general fuzziness. She couldn't recognize people: she didn't know who her boyfriend was for two weeks. That was kind of the goal. They wanted to get you to forget: to forget the trauma in order to change your behavior. The first time she'd gotten electroshock, she wanted it because she thought it would help. But the second time she didn't want it because she knew what it was like. But her family wanted her to have the treatment, so she did. Also, no one explained why she was being institutionalized. She was having fits, throwing things, not eating, and no one told her that she was actually sick. She didn't think of herself as mentally ill, she thought of herself as just being bad, and that was why she was put in this place. I think it comes down to this idea of agency. Back then, with the way people treated those dealing with mental illness, it was like they had no right to make decisions. And she really felt like she had no agency. But when she was institutionalized later in life, she didn't feel that way anymore. The treatment was better, and so she felt like she had the freedom to make more decisions for herself.



THE GUARDIANS

BY ANDREW BLUCHA

The Smoke in the Room

BY COURTNEY PATTERSON

I'm inside the smoke-filled claustrophobia of his barracks apartment. The carpet is uncomfortable and tight, a dingy grey-green in color. My mother is drunk. She always is when we come here. It's been a few weeks since Donald. Or maybe it's been days; I can't be sure. Daylight seems to pass slowly and quickly, simultaneously, and my nightmares are only getting worse and more persistent. My mother won't stop talking about it. I wish she would just stop. I relive it enough inside my own head on a daily basis. Every time I walk into that church, I feel like my throat might just shut forever, and I'll never be able to breathe again. My sister and I sit on the floor alone, while Martin, my mother, and two of his friends sit and play cards, drinking white Russians and rum and cokes.

Suddenly, I hear my mother say, "You're right, I'm going to call Ralph. He needs to know."

Now I'm listening to her say it, over and over again, and I feel like my ears might begin to bleed. She hands the phone to me with tears in her eyes and says, "Your dad wants to talk to you." I grip onto her cell phone, feeling nervous and uncomfortable.

"Hi, Daddy."

"Hi, baby girl. How are you?"

"I'm okay, I guess. I miss you."

"Yeah, I know, baby. I miss you too." He pauses. I can hear him breathing heavy on the other end.

"Your mom told me what happened, Courtney. Why didn't you say something sooner?"

I feel like he's angry with me, and it's all I can do not to cry. "I don't know, Daddy. I'm sorry." I start to cry.

"It's okay, baby. I'm going to come home. I'm going to see you, girls, just as soon as I can, okay?"

"Okay, Daddy. I love you."

"I love you too, baby. Put your mom back on the phone."

My mother takes the phone back from me, and now I'm listening carefully to what she's saying. I can guess what my father is saying based on her face and the words that spill from her intoxicated mouth.

"Ralph, how the fuck was I supposed to know? Of course, I didn't know... How could you say that? I don't know how I didn't see it!"

I just want them to stop fighting. They're always fighting. It reminds me of all the times I covered my ears to block it out, but just wanted to scream. Reminds me of the day he left and never came back.

I'm snapped out of those dark memories when I hear my mother say, "Well, Ralph isn't happy. Says he's coming home just as soon as he can talk to his Chief. He says he's going to fucking kill Donald. I can't believe he's angry with me! Said I should have 'fucking noticed something was wrong' and 'what kind of mother are you?' How the fuck was I supposed to know?" She takes another gulp from her drink, then drags the top of her hand across her mouth.

I imagine my father coming home on a white horse, all dressed in red and gold, with a beam of light shining all around him as he gallops to my rescue. Maybe I want him to kill Donald. I don't know. Maybe all I want is to know he still loves me. Sometimes, it feels like when he stopped loving my mom, he stopped loving Kaitlin and me, too, and I don't know why. I don't know what I did wrong, what we did wrong. The thought of him coming home makes me smile, but I try to remind myself not to get my hopes up. It hurts too much. He always says things and never does them.

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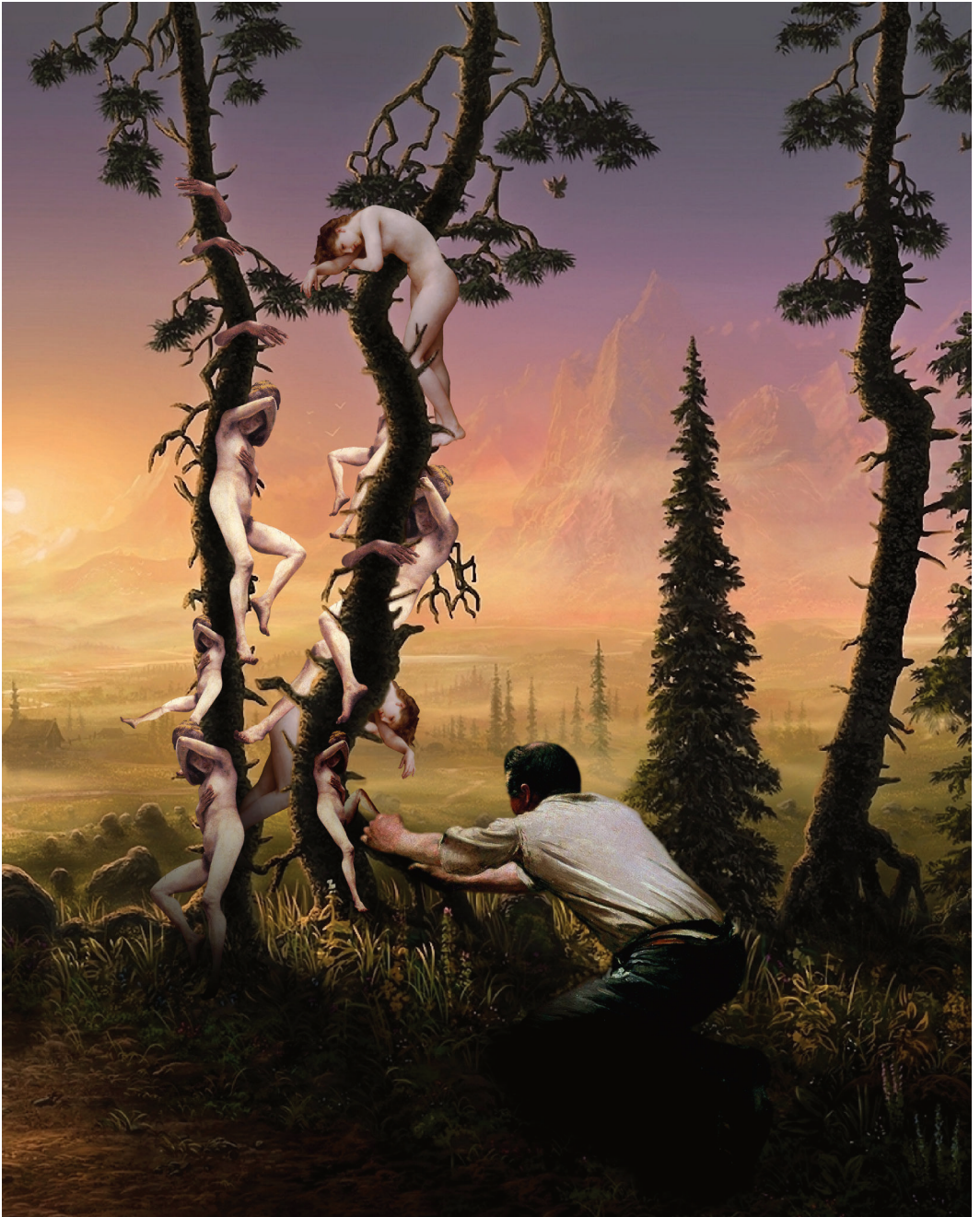
It's been several weeks, and he's still not here. I'll never get my knight in shining armor, a hero on a white horse, all dressed in red and gold. I'll never get my father. I can tell he's gone and, this time I know, he's never coming back. I don't know the reason. I don't know why we don't matter enough. I think, maybe if I died, he would care. Probably not. Probably wouldn't even fly back home for my funeral. I'm not a part of his life anymore; I never will be again.

My mother tells me every day, "He's not coming." I run into my bedroom, slam my face into the pillow, and cry.

...

Several months have passed, and he hasn't come. There is no white stallion storming the darkened castle, no lion to rip the flesh off Donald's bones. There is nothing. The hours drip into days and into nights, like slow, thick honey on the tip of my fingers. And then they start all over again. The nightmares don't stop, and somehow I know they won't for a very long time. I am a sea drowning alone inside of itself.

A fatherless daughter.



DENDROPHILIA

BY ANDREW BLUCHA

Balad, IR (1)

by MAKENZIE READ

Inspired by LeVana Lynn Johnson

stationed in Iraq i was headed for the bathroom it was dark out and my brothers in arms were sleeping but i couldn't sleep because i needed to pee i'd only been there for two months while most of the others for at least a year everyone else had caught on the subtle details of planning a body schedule in war

the cliques were already set i heard the rumors about me from people i didn't even know but everybody gossips because there's only that and the geedunk to live off of but i ate alone because i didn't know anyone and i felt so alone i just wanted to serve my country and save some money so that i could go to college without burdening

my family i loved them

so far away from my family my actual brothers my sister my father and mother i needed moments alone to cry

i had told my mother a few days ago i might be home for Christmas just a few more months

that night i just needed to pee and as i walked to the bathroom they jumped me i

felt confused as the base was secure there were no insurgents just my peers but i was flipped onto my back on the hard dusty ground and i fought to get up but they held me down punching my face with their fists and the butts of their guns and then shoving their hands between my legs ripping my clothes and i felt the pressure of my face welling up and i tried to turn over and scream but they gagged my mouth and then the welling moved to the pressure between my legs and it ripped me open afraid and dry and i started to cry and i couldn't fight anymore and they stopped for a moment one standing over me they were whispering to each other and the pressure turned to burning i could almost hear the skin between my legs start to sizzle with the acid they poured onto me i tried to get up and run

i couldn't see through my eyes drenched with blood and tears

they drug me to their tent i saw the flames rising up from my clothes a bullet went through me

and in the dark sands of war they said i committed suicide and sent me home

but my nose is still broken and my eyes are still black and my whole innocent life is still burnt and bleeding

like the rest of my family who you tell that my patriotism wasn't enough

that at 19 years old i was too weak to be valiant in my service to your money making cause and its men

when your cause disappears

I will remain in the desert

fighting

my blood alive and reaching

through the sands

digging into the skins of your history

I will not let go

and I will not disappear

Psychosomatic

BY SARAH JANE WEILL

It was in her head. Mostly along the length of her jaw, radiating upwards and outwards and backwards so that it often gripped the whole globe of her skull. A gnawing pain. A sensation unlike anything she'd experienced before. Alive and furious at all hours.

Phoebe didn't remember when the pain started, only when it became something she couldn't ignore. A Tuesday, last month, the drizzle outside threatening to swell into drops. Normally, Phoebe liked this kind of day, easily aligned with an afternoon sheltered in the university library. She had been sitting inside, a collection of books next to her opened laptop, when she finally understood her pain as horrific. A greedy thing equipped with fangs. She had been trying to work. Trying to transform her ideas into sentences, paragraphs. Into a mildly impressive midterm paper. Trying, but failing. Staring at her screen, Phoebe was only aware of the throbbing that wouldn't settle and dissolve. An ache impervious to the three aquamarine pills she had just swallowed with orange juice.

And the two, five hours earlier with iced coffee.

And the four, the previous night with water.

And the handfuls this month.

A monster. That was how Phoebe explained her pain. It started as a joke, a line she repeated to friends. *The fucking monster kept me up again last night.* A phrase that made her three roommates, all of them constant gorgers of horror movies, understand her pain. They knew the terror monsters caused; they didn't question her suffering.

But soon the thought, in private, veered farther into sincerity. Phoebe knew rationally, logically, there was no creature crawling around her skull. Still, she didn't know how else to think about her headache other than as an enemy to fight against. Her pain had its own presence, active and hungry. It feasted on her energy, growing more forceful as she deflated.

A true monster.

In time, Phoebe became a haunted version of herself. A papery husk. Agony changed how she interacted with the world. With people. She receded, unable to be anything but annoyed at the sight of her classmates, her friends all functioning and pleasant. Time whirled on and on and the world soon felt out of reach. Stretches of her day seemed real only when those pretty pills claimed dominance, lulled her pain to sleep. But that was just for hours. Minutes, sometimes.

Twice, Phoebe trekked to the university health center. The first time she went, there weren't any available appointments. The waiting room, the dim hallway, clogged with peaky students, all sniffing and coughing and wheezing. Listening to the swirling sounds, Phoebe tried to be aware of what and who she touched. She fumbled for hand sanitizer as soon as she was secure in the elevator. She made

her way back to the health center a week later, the earliest opening offered to her. The woman examining her didn't write down a single word Phoebe said. She just stood there with her arms crossed. It seemed like she had to force herself to be alert. She then suggested Phoebe increase her dose of painkillers and stop watching television late into the night.

Phoebe's life continued to collapse in on itself. Her meals consisted of dry cereal, protein bars, pretzels. Sustenance she only had to unbox or unwrap. She stopped answering emails. Only texted back a certain collection of friends, her parents. She missed class after class after class.

And at that, her mother, an unnerved voice transmitted across state lines, called and repeated a doctor's name twice. Horizontal in the dark with ice over her eyes, Phoebe misheard the first time. The pain, loud in its persistence, sometimes interfered with her hearing. Matthew Reese, not Matthew Rice, her mother corrected. He was a neurologist her mother had been reading about. Good schooling, a list of awards, all accounted for in his profile on the hospital website. Hearing her mother's severe insistence, her belief in this one man, Phoebe felt a piece of her hopelessness dislodge. She hung up, booked a series of appointments, trusting her mother's intelligence. Her instincts.

A few weeks ago, Phoebe took a train into the city for tests. That in and of itself felt like progress. A test would show something physical. Its results would be tangible. Well after the morning rush hour, she found an empty car. As the train woke, moved, she leaned her forehead against the window. From her side of the glass, the world muted. Rolling towards the doctor's office, towards the potential of peace, gratitude melted within her, warm and thick.

Today she repeated her journey, the same flush of anticipation in her blood, and now she was here at the closed office door. Phoebe reached for the doorknob, relief fizzing in her belly.

Sound was nearly absent in the waiting room. A fan spun hesitantly in the corner. The few people seated were staring at screens or books or the space in front of them. Phoebe made her way to the front desk. There was only one woman there, beside her a vacant chair and a snoozing computer. At the sound of her tiny cough, the receptionist looked up at Phoebe. The woman didn't seem much older than Phoebe. A recent college graduate, maybe; blonde with an avenue of purple lining the right side of her face. A lollipop fastened between her lips. Cherry, Phoebe smelled.

"Hi, I'm here to see Dr. Reese."

"Okay. What's your name, hon'?" As the receptionist spoke, the white stick bobbed in the corner of her mouth.

"Phoebe Miller." The receptionist turned back to her computer, clicking rapidly.

"Okay, gotcha, you can take a seat. He's a little behind schedule today, but he'll be with you soon." The receptionist nodded towards the couch, its pleather cushion sunken in memory of previous occupants, and resumed typing. Her nails,

also purple and filed into talons, loud on the plastic keys.

Phoebe obeyed, settled into the dented couch.

The waiting room was smaller than she had anticipated. The walls were coated a bizarre yellow, the color of mustard mixed with milk. At first Phoebe didn't mind the choice of paint. Yellow often a reminder of empty, sunlit days. But soon enough, the paint, by some terrible magic, fueled the fury of her pain.

Phoebe leaned forward, balanced her forehead in cupped palms. She'd barely slept the night before. Pain, yes, but anxiety too. Glinting hope. She pressed on her eyelids until shards of indigo flashed across her blackened vision. She tried to focus on the thought of air traveling deep into her lungs, then back out into the expanse of the world. She breathed.

The room smelled of chemicals and citrus. As if the floors, the counters, had been recently scrubbed by a strong, determined hand. Erasing dozens of smells, footprints, skin cells. Traces of other bodies. Other stories. These kinds of rooms didn't roil Phoebe's stomach. In fact, they were familiar, fixtures of her childhood. All her life, her father had spent his days examining x-rays, pointing out lines of fracture. He repaired bone. Meanwhile her mother, always more impressive to Phoebe, operated on glasslike newborns. Tended to their fighting lungs, their rickety hearts. An only child, Phoebe was often shuttled between her parents' practices, lugging plastic dolls and colored pencils to rooms like this one. In time she came to admire watching medicine at work. She witnessed the urgency and care with which her parents approached their patients. The responsibility they ascribed to each day. She had respected it all. She still did.

After sitting in the couch almost half an hour, the muscles in her lower back twitched, stiffening. Her pain was angered. It knew where they were and why. The monster wanted to play. Phoebe bit her lip and tears rose out of hiding.

Once, weeks ago in a more panicked moment after the health center visit, Phoebe thought about the other times she roared in distress. She even pressed pen to paper, made a list. The skin of her knee almost entirely shredded after crashing her bike. Her ankle bent and lame during a soccer game. Countless jammed toes. A dislocated shoulder, once, at summer camp. All of these moments so visceral, devastating. None of them compared to this pain, indeterminate and invisible.

To keep from howling, she scanned the space around her. Tried to be aware of things. The clock with painted blue figures, a fat black rim. The vase of plastic hydrangeas, the stems a too-perfect green. A color that reminded her of a knit sweater she loved until she lost. The unstable tower of magazines on the table in front of her crossed legs. The one on top dated January despite the spring warmth surging outside. Phoebe leaned closer to reach the tabloid; an object of pictures and words, it was a thing of distraction. She let it balance flat in her lap and was faced with an actress. Her body more fit than slender, a rarity in that business. Her hair peroxided to be fair. Angelic. On screen she morphed into a detective, hunting murderers and rapists and abusive husbands, scrubbing society of its spots of evil. Hers was a television show Phoebe recently had been letting fill the apartment with

noise as she iced her forehead and prayed for sleep.

Phoebe turned to the actress's interview. Questions bolded in pink. Answers clean in black. Her eyes strained to understand the sentences, the logic of text, but it was impossible. The more she tried to focus, the more she instead yielded to her pain. She returned the magazine to its stack.

"Phoebe?" A woman called from the hallway. Her eyes weary behind thick maroon glasses. Tall and sticklike except for the pouch of belly that suggested she possessed not one or two but three genetic miniatures. A house a constant whorl of chaos. Tiny feet and gummed hands everywhere. Crude macaroni art hung high in the kitchen.

"Yes," Phoebe replied. Her step a little too quick, she nearly bounded forward.

"Right this way, second door on the right." The nurse pointed as she spoke, the whole of her arm a stiff line.

"Thank you," Phoebe said as the woman held the door open for her.

The nurse wrapped a cuff around Phoebe's upper arm, recorded her blood pressure. She steadied a thermometer beneath the soft pink of Phoebe's tongue, made note of her temperature. Following routine, the nurse was quick with her touch and sparse with her words.

"He'll be with you shortly," she said when she was finished.

"Okay, thank you." The nurse nodded in response and left.

Abandoned and seated in the exam chair, Phoebe was again suspended in near silence. She waited. The room was bare, a clone of its neighbors, she was sure. A single line of cabinets on the wall, hovering above a tiny counter with sealed instruments on display beside a sink. Each time Phoebe shifted, even slightly, the paper beneath her crackled. The sound, evidence of her body alone and patient but anxious. Even though the thought of the doctor's hands, his voice, didn't make her want to run, her heart was loud in her ears.

The monster was canny today. It scratched, punched, tore. Relentless.

Phoebe waited.

Dr. Matthew Reese entered the room unhurriedly. Arms like brass pendulums at his sides. His face clean shaven, black hair gelled with care. There was a certain solidity to him, Phoebe noticed. Stable, angular jaw. Little flesh hiding his bones. His shoulders strained against the rigid fabric of his coat. He seemed aware of himself, which only made Phoebe more observant of his presence.

"Phoebe Miller, how are we doing today?" His voice boomed as if he'd just downed a steaming espresso. She shrugged in response.

"The same, I guess. My head's bothering me right now."

He settled on his stool across from Phoebe. His legs wide, hands splayed and idle atop his thighs. With one of his thumbs he began to make small circles into his muscle. A runner, Phoebe guessed, tending to a site of soreness. It was simple, but Phoebe found something odd in the gesture. She knotted her own hands together, squeezed. Waited.

"Well, that's why we're here, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Anything different about the pain today? Any changes since I've seen you?"

"No, not really."

"You said you're in school?" As he spoke, he glanced briefly at her chart, but didn't seem to be reading anything.

"Yes."

"What year?"

"I'm a junior."

"Must be a lot of work."

"Sure, sometimes. Around exams mostly."

"What are you studying?"

"Marine biology."

"Ah, going to save the coral reefs from extinction?"

"Something like that." She never knew how to respond to remarks like that, but she tried to be polite, jovial. For his sake.

"And how much sleep do you think you get?"

"I don't know. A normal amount?"

"For a college student."

"Yes, I guess so."

"So that's, what, six hours?"

"Probably. Except not with the headaches, so maybe a little less."

"Right. And when you do sleep, do you sleep through the night?"

"Mostly, yes. At least I did before the pain got worse."

"Of course, okay. What about meals?"

"What about them?"

"You're going to the dining hall, eating healthy?"

"I cook mostly. We have a kitchen in our apartment."

"Lucky girl. When I was in school, I just had a hot plate. Used an old frisbee for a bowl, sometimes." He paused, smiling at some vague memory before turning back to Phoebe. For a moment something in his face betrayed a kind of disappointment. As if he resented being stuck in the present. "Look I'm going to cut to the chase, Phoebe," he continued. "Your tests didn't show anything, and from the information you just gave me I can only see one explanation for these little headaches of yours: stress." For a moment, Phoebe thought she misheard.

"Stress?"

"It's pretty common. Busy schedule, little sleep, and, bam, you get these headaches. Simple as that."

She wasn't quite sure how to respond. Stress was not a diagnosis. Not what she wanted. She needed words heavy with meaning. An answer.

"But these aren't just headaches," she tried to argue, until he interrupted.

"That's what you've told yourself. I think you've worked yourself up thinking about what's happening to you. The mind is a powerful thing, Phoebe. Almost any physiological symptom you can imagine can become *real* when we are in distress, even if there is nothing actually wrong with us. Amazing, right?"

This information refused to sink into her. Instead it rebounded outwards, rubber balls flying backwards from a wall of brick.

"Well, I, I don't think that's what this is."

"Trust me, I know what I'm talking about. There's nothing physiologically wrong with you. This pain is psychosomatic. You haven't hit your head or anything recently, correct? No car accidents or other physical trauma?"

Psychosomatic. The word punctured her hope.

"No."

"Exactly. And, if my notes are accurate, you said the headaches just came on out of nowhere, isn't that right?"

"Well yes, but, that's just because I can't remember the first one."

"Exactly. I'm sure college is a little more stressful than you were expecting, you're feeling a little overwhelmed. Sometimes that's all it takes. Pain's like the body's alarm system, but sometimes the danger isn't always what you think."

Phoebe was stunned. She didn't know how to make him understand. He saw her distress and seemed unconcerned. Unconvinced.

"I'm sure this information will take a little time to sink in," Dr. Reese continued. "Take a break from work. Get some more rest. In a week or two you'll be good as new."

"But," she paused, trying to keep her voice even, "but what if that doesn't work?"

"It will. Phoebe, you need to relax. Once you do that, I promise you, your headaches will go away. Life will go back to normal."

Suddenly she wanted to shriek, to explain the ferocity, the tenacity, the absolute hunger of the monster in her head. Feeding and feeding until there was nothing left of her. It wasn't just stress. These weren't just headaches. The monster was not some benign poltergeist. She wouldn't survive with this pain in her head. It would win, in time.

Yet her rage was anchored deep within her, unable to rise to the surface.

At her silence, Dr. Reese clicked his pen closed, tucked the gleaming instrument into the pocket of his coat. Without ceremony, he closed her file. Her information, her symptoms and complaints, all sealed, soon to be stored in a file cabinet. Slipped between other accounts of aching bodies. Forgotten.

The grin on his face, all teeth and confidence. Dr. Reese, Phoebe was certain, considered himself helpful. He would never believe her pain was monstrous, not like her friends did. Uttering her idea might even put Phoebe's body at greater risk. Confinement. Observation. Other, more intense pills. With that thought, Phoebe realized she didn't even need him to understand her pain exactly as she did. She just needed him to listen.

“Look,” Dr. Reese said, his body already partially outside of the room, “I can give you some stronger pain meds but honestly I don’t think you need them. And you only want to be on that stuff if you really need it, right?”

Phoebe kept her head bent forward as he spoke. She couldn’t look up to meet his gaze.

“I guess,” she mumbled. She didn’t care if he heard her response or not. It didn’t matter. The conversation, mere minutes, had been hollow. This man was never going to offer her any radical help, and Phoebe couldn’t understand why. Maybe she never would.

Phoebe stood, stepped through the doorway behind her doctor.

She had no choice but to return to the receptionist’s desk, hand over her credit card. As she waited for her receipt and the insurance form, Phoebe spotted the white lollipop stick discarded next to the computer keyboard. The red candy was almost entirely gone, sucked and then chewed by the looks of what remained. The gnawed cherry remains reminded Phoebe of rough crystals. Glittering and jagged, discovered in some ancient, echoing cave. She clung to the sight as she stood there, her head throbbing.

Free Counseling

BY SCOTT REEL

“No one takes mental health seriously—or seriously takes people without mental health. I guess the result is the same. It’s easier nowadays to gain a handicap spot for being colorblind than it is an extension on a class paper for depression and anxiety. But that’s not why I’m here, although I wish it were that simple. And to answer your next two questions, yes, I’ve thought about hurting myself, and, yes, I’ve thought about hurting others, but only philosophically in the first case and romantically in the second.

“By philosophically, I mean pondering the method of suicide most likely to make me a viral hit. If there’s anything I’ve learned in the past five years, it’s that the intrinsic value of a human equates to the ratio between how many likes and how many views one has on social media, which would render me valueless and, ironically, my hypothetical suicide invaluable. In my philosophy class I told my professor that this is what Kant had meant by the thing-in-itself, but she didn’t find it nearly as funny as I did. *Lustig, nicht?*

“I imagined painting my entire body gold and then hanging it from the four-sided British-looking street clock outside of the Manhattan Trump Tower. Such an act would surely elevate me to icon status. But after considering it for a few seconds, I realized that not only would this be a logistical nightmare, but it would also symbolically suggest giving Trump the time of day, and that would be contrary to my intended statement. And, no, as you probably assumed, I don’t *actually* want to achieve icon status. Desiring such a status would entail desiring validation from a population of morons, validation that would then be invalidated by the fact that the population consists of morons. So, now that I think about it, the suicide would be both logistically and logically nightmarish.

“I was joking, anyways.

“But, as you probably noticed, I wasn’t really joking about romanticizing the idea of thinning the herd. Honestly, though, at this point if you haven’t thought about it, then I think you ought to be looked at, or perhaps just immediately thrown into the thinning. To be fair, it does look like you’ve thought about it, and perhaps are thinking of it right now. In any case, I meant the general ‘you’. I mean, more than half of America is still arguing about which crayons belong in the crayon box, and ironically they’re the ones that should be put in a box, if you know what I mean...

“That was a test.

“Thank God, you passed. I wanted to see how long you’d let me rant about the two counseling no-no’s before two guys in white rubber suits boot-kicked down the door and black-bagged me. Did that feel racist, or does guilt just necessarily follow from saying black and white in the same sentence? Yep, just got anxiety.

“Anyway, no, I’m not actually going to hurt anyone, at least not intentionally or violently. Violence is so exhausting and beastishly emotional. And, as for hurting myself, contrary to all of the self-deprecation that has already come and all that which is likely to follow, I know I am a sunflower among dandelions: I’m just an existentially vexed sunflower. Too much cloud cover, you know, too many weeds.

“It’s probably more interesting to ask why you’re here. I know that you’re a PhD student. All of the counselors are, I think, which is why the counseling is free, I imagine, one of the only free things at NYU. I’m not complaining, just saying. I mean, I’m always complaining, but you know what I mean. I know you’re not going to answer. I’m stalling.

“I don’t know why I’m here.

“Trump is almost what made me seek out counseling during the fall semester. I know that much. It was my first semester here at NYU after moving to New York from southern Illinois. My head had been buried in books since September, but, after a few months, one Tuesday in November, shortly after my midterm wave of exams had passed, I glanced at the television, squinted, and saw Trump waving to a cheering crowd through a light fog. He stood proudly in one of those smart yet simple suits that every presidential candidate wears, one he should be barred from wearing (one Obama wore better than the likes of any) which belied his exotically ridiculous bobbling head. Some brilliant craftsman had fabricated him into a doll-ish American figure, as something everyone was expected to believe to be the next president of the never-ending United Debates.

“And somehow, it worked.

“Immediately after witnessing that, I ran. I thought I was hallucinating and burst out onto the street. I sprinted through clouds of coffee breath and cigarette smoke, then climbed up to this floor where I was halted by the sleepy front desk receptionist. She asked why I was running, but rather than answer, I simply inversed her question. Why AREN’T you running? Why isn’t everyone running? I mean I buried my head for less than a semester and what happens? The American people just hand over the country to Satan’s lackey.

“All she said was, ‘Oh, that. Yeah,’ which I guess was fair: she seemed to have imploded while I had exploded, and given our inversed inquiry exchange, this made sense to me. She was dead inside, I was out.

“I asked if I could talk to someone, but she said that I couldn’t ‘get in’ until the following week, bunching up one of her cheeks as she delivered the disappointing news, as if to say, ‘Shucks, better just grab a handful of free condoms and figure it out,’ suggesting I could just thrust my way out of the immediate situation, not to mention the ongoing daily situation of depression and anxiety called life. Although, if that was her intended implication, then it wouldn’t be the worst advice, likely more effective than any ‘solution’ from Big Pharma or my parents, but we’ll get to them in a minute. As far as sex goes, we’re still in New York, so no matter what anyone says or advises, herpes is far worse and more permanent than depression, anxiety, or a few voices in your head. We can talk about the voices

later, perhaps after mom and dad. But it wouldn't be hard...to fornicate your way free of a dark mind, I mean—pun intended. Hard? Nevermind. At least it wouldn't be hard to find the partners—okay, I'll stop saying hard. Seriously, though, people love screwing sad people. Everyone fantasizes about fixing the people they sleep with. The sadder you look at the bar, the more explicit they'll be. Maybe that's why universities always put out free condoms near the counselors' offices. That's my theory, anyway. You don't have to tell me if I'm right. Trade secrets, I get it. They're not even paying you.

"Sorry, probably shouldn't keep bringing that up.

"The receptionist situation, if you can even recall the details after such a digression, ended somewhat anticlimactically. She said she could probably 'get me in' the following week, but I didn't think it made much sense to schedule counseling right before holiday break. Perhaps that wasn't a good idea after all, though, since my break was a horror story in itself, a nightmare that I believe is what actually, finally drove me here. If it wasn't holiday break that pushed me over the edge, then it was having to spend the entire first week of this semester's classes having to recall and relate my break to my classmates, because *of course* no academic work can possibly be accomplished at any university until everyone goes up and down the rows listening to how everyone else's break was.

"Trump didn't really have anything to do with my internal angst of impending doom, to be honest, even though I did actually run here that day. I actually just wanted smoke out your political views, but I'm pretty sure you're a robot, so by default that would make you a liberal and anti-Trump. Your silence convicted you this time.

"Nothing? I guess I'll continue.

"On a more serious note, my holiday break started with what now, after giving it some thought, I'd like to call a *performative mental breakdown*. That may not sound overly serious, but I assure you, it was. You're probably wondering what such a thing looks like, but what's more interesting is how one accidentally and unknowingly 'performs' a mental breakdown. The story is much more fulfilling than the experience, I assure you. At my own expense, I will relate it to you, but only because you're not one of my classmates and no one is forcing me and it looks like you could use a laugh.

"As soon as classes ended and break began, I realized that I needed to get out of the dorm. I had no idea what New York actually looked like—aside from Washington Square Park, but doesn't count because it's basically just a hippie collective loitering around a watering hole—since classes commenced literally one second after I got settled in my room. All I had been able to do from the moment I got here until break was study. And the most exercise I had managed to perform was my Trump run to the free condoms bowl. So, I felt I could use the sightseeing and the blood flow—not the kind of blood flow free latex tacitly implies. God, I'm on a roll today. I know, I'm super mature.

"I ended up taking the A-train all the way up to 116th, where Central Park

starts. I figured I'd walk all of Central Park, Times Square, and Midtown back to NYU, where I would finish, collapse on my twin bed, and sleep until the following day. I happened to actually accomplish that but not with the relieved sense of cosmopolitan productiveness that I'd imagined and desired prior to the trip.

"My urban excursion did, however, begin as planned: Central Park was more spiritually uplifting than I ever even dared to expect. It's huge! I felt like I'd completed a Spartan Race just sauntering from one end to the other. But that fingertip tingling elation engendered by Central escaped like heat from the head as I slowly made my way into the escalating madness that is Times Square.

"I did appreciate the madness for one second, though, because Times Square sat before me like the perfect representation of the inside of my brain, which, like the Big Apple itself, is absolutely brilliant suffocating freaking chaos—minus all of the ineffably infuriating selfie taking. Thank God my brain doesn't have *that* to deal with.

"‘This is my city!’ I told myself, trying to embrace it for what it was, imbibe it as a refecation of myself. But then I remembered that I hate myself and, thus, realized that I too hated Times Square and perhaps all of humanity—even more than I already did—for creating such a monstrosity. Still, with persistence and perseverance, I made it through Times Square with a little air left in my lungs.

"After I squeezed out of the riotous human ant farm, I had to inch through Midtown, shaking at each spotlight like a rescue dog—one that needs rescuing, not one providing it, obviously. I shuffled along 5th, covering my ears as if I was standing next to a speaker at Coachella, slowly losing myself to another panic attack, which was virally spreading throughout my entire body. This continued until I saw the arch, the beloved arch that typically frames the Washington Square Park fountain, the hippie collective watering hole, but which at this time of year perfectly framed the Park's yearly Christmas tree. Salvation! I thought.

"I'm not even Christian, but Christmas, including its associations and accoutrement, in this century, has nothing to do with Christianity whatsoever. If it is indeed Jesus's annual banger, then a lot of people show up to the house party without invitation from or acquaintance with the host, which is obviously still Jesus in this hypersecular fratty metaphor of Xmas, a much more fitting word nowadays, I believe, don't you think? Bueller? You seem like an Xmas sort of guy rather than a Christmas sort of guy, if you get what I'm saying.

"Nevermind, I don't even know what I'm saying.

"Anyway, like a whale with a blowhole, in dire need of air, I swam through the profoundly inattentive virtually (in both senses of the word) enslaved sidewalk crowd, all of them with their necks broken towards their phones, until I finally reached one of the marble-like benches. Exasperated, reaching the summit of my trek and the apex of my panic, I stood on the long winding bench and blew out a guttural scream, half Leonardo DiCaprio in *The Revenant*, half Brendan Fraser in *George of the Jungle*. My nonverbal tribal call for help penetrated like light between

and beyond all of the branches of every tree throughout the square.

“My head bent back, my mouth pointed like a cannon toward the sky, until finally, after what seemed like a minute of petulant, narcissistic outcrying, I stilled my trembling vocal chords, lowered my head, and dared to reestablish eye contact with my fellow race. I panted, quietly, with darting eyes. At first glance, my surroundings appeared unchanged; indeed, it seemed as it always did, with performers performing and passersby passing by.

“Such was the case until I noticed a woman, perhaps we could even call her a girl, with unkempt hair—not from homelessness, but in the name of fashion, you know the type. She had a nose ring and a cigarette—basically the poster child for all girl-women at NYU—and she happened to be walking in what appeared to be my direction. She looked at me menacingly, sexually, stoically—all or none of these, I couldn’t definitively decide then and I can’t definitively remember now—until she reached my feet, which stood in penguin formation at thigh height. I looked down at her eyes and then the top of her paper-bag-colored hair as she bent down, placed a dollar bill in an empty McDonalds cup that stood, invisible to me until that exact moment, directly below my feet.

“Then she walked away.

“I watched her, dumbfounded, as distance befell the two of us. She weaved through the crowd, bobbing in and out. I didn’t, couldn’t, take my eyes off of her receding figure, but I could hear, during this time, a variety of metallic notes as people followed suit and dropped their coffee change into the cup divinely placed beneath me. This is why I now consider my mental breakdown essentially performative, intent be damned.

“Since I was, in fact, compensated, I have mixed emotions about the whole affair. I can’t decide whether I feel taken-seriously or completely trivialized. Such is the life of the performer, I suppose. I’m sure you can understand my frustration.

“But while entertaining (literally and figuratively), this story isn’t actually the meat of my winter break breakdown. As if I had spat at the gods, which I guess, in a way, I had, my mom and dad touched down at JFK the following day. I told this story to my mother, Linda, a name you should most certainly write down and underscore for safe keeping, as I escorted her and my father from Jamaica to Penn Station.

“It still baffles me that the station is actually named Jamaica, but that is neither here nor there.

“She said something along the lines of, ‘Oh honey, you’ve always been so dramatic. But if the noise is really that unbearable, then your father and I could get you some of those nice headphones as an early Christmas present?’ My father hadn’t paid any attention whatsoever to what she’d been saying and sat uncomfortably, shifting around on the subway’s plastic seat, staring at the laughably enormous text on his iPhone, which I had jokingly programmed, thinking it was a riot, until he said, ‘Perfect! How did you do that?’

“Back to mom, I laughed and told her that the only peace and quiet in

Manhattan is in a public restroom, the absolute worst place for peace and quiet. Can't they play something, anything at all in the bathroom? I mean Jesus, why does every single human being have to listen to my every flatulent and fecal cannonball with surround sound clarity? It's enough to give me an aneurysm or heart palpitations, while never facilitating the task at hand.

"Have you ever noticed the insanity of that? Don't answer that.

"I won't go into every detail of Linda and James's holiday stay. They were overwhelmed by New York but stayed positive, as one can maintain only on a short visit. It was good to see them, though, I guess, being that I don't have anyone here. I didn't get to see them much growing up. My father sent me off to private school, so it feels like I've been away at college for my entire life. He said he wouldn't have me grow up to be a 'dumb bum' like he and mom, but then, ironically, he's resented me for being smarter than him ever since. I'd have to dodge a hand swat if I tried to slide a three-syllable word into a sentence. I became pretty proficient at being smart and playing dumb, but that's the act I've kept up my entire life. It's driving me nuts, but not more so than anything else, I guess.

"You'd think I'd blame my father for everything, but it's really on Linda's bar that I rack the weight of my childhood sorrow, simply because of her incompetence, her gelatin spine. My father may have been a tyrant growing up, but at least he forged his own way, aggressively and not passively, audibly and not tacitly. My mom, in the fetal position, has simply cowered in his wake position since they got married at twenty. Of course, he never noticed. Or perhaps he did notice and just never expressed it, as it was an expectation for his wife to scrunch herself up into a ball behind him, the man, the leader. Call it what you want, Linda never dared to protect me from him. The only way I could defend myself was to succeed beyond reproach.

"And although he never hit me, I would have loved to have been beaten instead of having to suffer through his emotional and cerebral torture. Honestly, I have to give him credit. I wouldn't have thought he had the intellect to abuse me the way he did. But I guess that underpins his entire philosophy behind sending me away for my education: he knew he was intelligent and resented the fact that no one gave him the opportunity to earn the pieces of paper necessary to unlock the vault to the money in this country. I can understand that, and I think that's why my anger never finds him for very long. I respect his intelligence. On the other hand, while I don't respect my mother, she has my love, or pity, but we all know what Nietzsche said about pity. Is pity a thing in counseling?

"Don't answer that. We can't afford another digression.

"The point is that I had to be perfect in school or else I'd come home on break and be belittled into the frozen ground with caustic, existential criticism. He would always say things like, 'Mediocre grades at a great school will only get you mid-level management, nothing over one hundred and fifty K—if you're lucky! I've earned that with perfect grades at shit schools!'

"That is when all of it started, the muttering, the depression, the anxiety.

“Once I raised my hand in class, and I must have been too excited and reached too high because one of the scabs on my wrists cracked under my white dress shirt and started bleeding. The bell rang, but my teacher put out his arm, holding me back until everyone had left. He told me to roll up my sleeve, and I said that really wasn’t necessary, but he didn’t propose it as an option. After he saw the cuts on my arms, some scarred and some new, he said he’d have to call home.

“I said if you do that, you will be far more destructive than the razor blade behind this, ditching the whole student-teacher dynamic, which felt moot at that point. He was playing hardball, so I spoke to him at eye-level. I would be damned if I was going to live like my mother. We stood silently. I could feel his breath on my face, as neither of us would break eye contact. I almost asked, ‘Do we make out now, like, what’s your move?’ But he only told me, with the utmost seriousness, to cover it up and cut it out. It took everything I had not to say, ‘I assume the pun was not intended,’ but I didn’t and left, muttering to myself what a piece of trash I was all the way back to my room.

“I have muttered to myself for years, vocalizing my father to avoid hearing him, to keep myself perfect, which I have, on paper, anyway. Eventually my muttering went silent and bought office space in one of the high rises in the Times Square that is my mind. But, back to the point, to my boundless frustration, my father was right. I was accepted into every school to which I applied.

“He hadn’t emotionally abused me for a few years by that point, since he didn’t have a tenable argument, but, of course, we butt heads over what I would major in. I said it would be philosophy or literature and he said it would be computer science or statistics. We settled on a double major in computer science and philosophy with a minor in literature, only because, he said, philosophy is logic-based and being well-read makes one cultured, which will set me apart from all of the other coders out of college who will inevitably write to fruition our future, for better or worse. Thankfully, ever since I left the house, he’s treated me like an adult, except he tells me I better not be some ‘French whore’ at school, which I assume and accept to be a fairly normal command for parents of all students, phrasing aside.

“As for the voices, no, I don’t think I’m schizophrenic. Everyone has voices in their heads. It’s just easier to call them voices. But really, in my case, I think they are just unfettered thoughts running on solar panel emotions. My emotions have direct fuel injection to my thoughts with indefinite sustainability. I don’t know squat about cars or sustainable energy, but I assume they are as they sound. The beauty is that my voices are impervious to insult in a world that has become hyper offended by everything—I try to see the light in these things, thanks to Linda.

“Anyway, it’s not like I let them control me. I dish it back, not to mention that there is no coherent self for my voices to target. Thank God for philosophy! Instead of hating only one of myself, I have millions of myselfs to hate and blame for whatever censorship the voices attempt to proposition!

“Sorry, I’ve had a lot of coffee this morning, and I really like philosophy. Unfortunately, though, I don’t think philosophy is conducive to mental health. That’s why I’m here, actually. That’s exactly it.”

“Our hour is up.”

“How convenient.”



Hope in an Unjust Land

BY CAITLIN HACKETT

Watercolor, colored pencil, and ink on cold press watercolor paper. 6 x 9 inches.

Fish, Frogs, and Alluvial Fans

BY DAN LINEHAN

A song wasn't what got me aboard the first airplane, mile zero, the start of a meandering journey to Antarctica, but a different kind of transmission that I ended up hearing from a radio station inside a log cabin surrounded by giant coastal redwood trees. How I came to hear it was not a mystery by any stretch. Tracing back, it made perfect sense. It would have been impossible, though, to predict how I would end up here. My life to this point had been dedicated to preparing for this moment. Only now did I begin to recognize it. And with time to sink in, I would finally understand the magnitude.

It had poured nonstop throughout the night before but began to clear as I left early in the morning from my home in Monterey, California. I usually slept great in the rain but instead had chosen to sacrifice rest for more last-minute preparations. With a little more than thirty hours of travel ahead of me, I had plenty of time on my four crisscrossed flights to play catch-up. Flying to Los Angeles, to Washington, D.C., to Buenos Aires, and then to Ushuaia would sadly be the protracted yet most expedient way for me to reach the *Southern Aurora* bound for Antarctica, a frozen land changing faster than any other place on Earth. I wanted to see it happening for myself by stepping onto its inhospitable ice. I wanted to write about it.

With my head pressed against the airliner window, my eyes drifted aimlessly as I huffed pained breaths at the countryside below. During the previous flight—a puddle jumper from Monterey—rough turbulence had rattled us most of the way. My lingering nausea finally began to subside. I typically didn't get airsick. Motion sick in a car as a backseat passenger, sometimes. But seasickness was a near certainty in water with waves not much bigger than ripples. Soon I'd be sailing the roughest water on the planet. What the hell was I thinking?

Somewhere, down there, our jet-speed shadow traced east over land contours as we flew over a high desert speckled with Joshua trees and craggy rock outcrops. At least I'd seen river systems while flying south along the coast from Monterey to Los Angeles. Now water conveyance occurred not between riverbanks but inside concrete aqueducts. Rivers didn't belong to deserts. I was not sure uncovered aqueducts did either. This was no place for the streams and rivers I'd known back when I was a kid. I wondered if the ones near my old home still flowed or if anything still lived in them. I missed them and the time when my major concerns were finding bait for hooks or tying the right knot on spinners or fish-shaped lures so that they wouldn't slip off if they got snagged when I dared to cast too close to partially submerged branches and fallen tree trunks. Those were the places fish liked to hide. I never worried about catching them. Always did.

As the coast and Los Angeles disappeared in our contrails, salt flats and dry lakes became sand dunes and solidified lava flows, then mesas and plateaus,

then small mountains with alluvial fans that looked like glaciers running down a mountain. Only, alluvial fans were made from sediments of sand and soil, not deposits of ice and snow. As we cut across the top of Arizona and into New Mexico, the scorched, rocky terrain had the color of fire until we reached the nearly impenetrable wall formed by the Rocky Mountains, a more than 3,000-mile-long range that ran deep into Canada to the north and stopped shy of the Mexican border to the south. But even Mount Elbert, the tallest peak of the range at 14,440 feet, could not touch us, cruising up at an altitude of 7 miles, giving us about 4 miles of clearance.

It was not too high to miss seeing the dehydrated rivers like the once-mighty Colorado River that, in 1998, had stopped flowing all the way to the sea. This river had made its way into the Sea of Cortez for 6 million years. Now the siphoned-off Colorado River became a trickle and evaporated into nothingness more than 70 miles from the seashore.

The Rockies formed a continental divide, which our jetliner stepped over like it was a street-side curb. Butted against these mountains stretched the undulating and roaming Great Plains, their tan, dry, and grassy vastness blanketing much of Middle America. This series of geological transitions reminded me of the stages of life. Often they were abrupt and immediate, like the boundaries between the coasts, deserts, mountains, and plains. For my life they certainly were. How easy it was to look out the window of the airplane to see my insides spread out across the terrain below.

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I was born in Miami, Florida, but my family moved to Long Island when I was five. Growing up in Long Island was a fantastic experience. The island looked like a fish. At the head were two of the five boroughs of New York City: the top of the mouth was Queens and the bottom was Brooklyn. The north fork of the tail ended at Orient Point, while Montauk Point lay at the end of the south fork. I was from Smithtown, which was about halfway girth- and lengthwise.

Smithtown's claim to fame was a large bronze statue commemorating the bull that the town founder purportedly rode during a summer solstice in order to claim land from the Native Americans, which was hard for me to wrap my head around on so many levels. The years have given the bull a light bluish-green veneer. But inebriated townsfolk, or sometimes jealous relatives from neighboring towns without bovine monuments, often ritualistically painted the bull's bullhood in flashy colors.

Even though I was landlocked as a kid, I was never far from water. Our house was surrounded by parks and undeveloped land with water all around. And though my friends and I knew the woods like the backs of our hands, it never stopped us from exploring or fishing or concocting some mission of vital importance that justifiably allowed us to return late for dinner.

My upbringing was camping, sloshing through swamps and bogs and mud, climbing trees, and throwing dirt bombs from mud forts during the summer and

snowballs from forts made of snow during the winter. It wasn't considered growing up in the country. You could consider it growing up in the wild.

But for as much time as I spent in the outdoors, I knew nothing about the environment and did not realize when I first heard the word. The environment was always something that just was. It never had to come in for dinner. Already made of dirt, the environment never had to wash it off from every surface. But more important, the environment always seemed much larger than I was, vastly more formidable, and simply able to fend for itself without care. It never had to go to bed early because it didn't come home in time for dinner or fail to wash up.

What I remembered most from this time was being outdoors and loving it. Back then, I took the fish for granted. I took the frogs for granted. I took all the animals for granted. I really had to stretch my memory to recall my first outreach on behalf of wildlife.

One morning, while in my late teens, I'd woken up early to go fishing with Eddie, one of my younger brothers, at nearby Blydenburgh Park. Just past the skunk cabbage and muck at the swampy eastern edge of Stump Pond, we usually caught largemouth bass and sometimes reeled in bluegills and yellow perch. The pond was at the headwaters of the Nissequogue River, which flowed into Long Island Sound.

As we started casting from shore, we noticed a large American bullfrog sitting right along the edge of the water. I caught all kinds of snakes and turtles and lizards and frogs. Never a bullfrog, though. Usually the much smaller pickerel frogs and Fowler's toads.

I crept up to give it a try. Somehow I was able to reason that instead of trying to grab where the bullfrog was, I should try to catch where the frog might be—in the air—once it jumped. I was dumbfounded and a hundred times more astounded than that bullfrog when I actually managed to snatch it around its waist mid-jump. I certainly would have garnered the highest admiration of Steinbeck's Mack and the boys, even after the grand success of their own frog-collecting foray within the pages of *Cannery Row*.

It didn't take more than a few microseconds to hatch my plan. My sister, Marie, was a big fan of Kermit the Frog. So, I hightailed it out of the park, leaving my fishing gear with my brother, jumped on my bike, and pedaled like mad with the giant frog in my hand as its long legs dangled in the airstream. I ran into my house and snuck up to my sister's room. My good luck held out. Not only was my sister asleep, she faced me and slept near the edge of the bed. I got real close and put the bullfrog a few inches from her nose. I started calling softly, "Marie, Marie, Marie," until she woke up . . . and screamed.

Knowing a little of my family history explained a lot. I was the oldest brother, and she was the only girl of six. Out of all us, she was the one to become a herpetologist with a side expertise in bats. I liked to think I'd had a helpful influence on her career choice. You never knew what experiences would make life-long impacts on kids.

At one time or another I had just about every kind of pet there was. Snakes,

lizards, salamanders, frogs, toads, fish, hermit crabs, guinea pigs, dogs, ants (yes, an actual ant farm), birds, and so on. I spent hours in an exotic bird store in town and even helped out. When I was too young to work for cash, I worked in a pet shop for store credit. My mother drew the line at a large, hairy, fanged tarantula. She made sure my father drove me back to the pet shop right away to return it.

I still loved animals, but had since become less enthused about animals as pets. I preferred to use my time and energy to help them prosper in the wild because this was where they needed our help the most.

• • •

Before becoming a freelance writer, I had worked as a microchip engineer for a company based in Silicon Valley. My master's degree was in materials science, which was the study of the composition, structure, and properties of stuff. It didn't go to waste after I switched careers. Exactly the opposite. This background provided me with an uncommon insight into how and why the world functioned as it did. Much of my writing was for educational publishing companies, where I covered the hard sciences, like physics and chemistry. Though, I often softened up with poetry, journalism, and other forms of writing.

As my focus shifted more and more to the environmental and natural sciences, exposure to the heated subject of climate change was inevitable. How could we humans possibly cause changes to the atmosphere and climate on such a global scale?

Looking up, the sky seemed to reach all the way to the stars. This was an illusion. In reality the atmosphere around Earth was more like a single thin layer of plastic wrap that tightly covered a basketball. Hadn't the air pollution we produced caused holes in the ozone layer high above the surface of Earth? Hadn't the smoke from burning coal turned water in the clouds into acid that then rained down from the sky very far from the source of the smoke? Once pollution restrictions were put in place, then these problems began to reverse. Even the horrendous, human-caused smog that choked Los Angeles greatly relaxed its death grip on the city after tighter emission standards were adopted. Was climate change that much of a stretch from these problems? I needed to know more.

One did not just simply buy a ticket to Antarctica. No airliners flew there. No hotels existed there. And just plain roughing it was the surest way to freeze to death. So, I kept my eyes and ears open for opportunities while mulling over how to pull off something like this.

Living on the Monterey Peninsula, I was surrounded by the rugged and rocky Pacific Ocean coastline. Like back in the wilds during my youth, only now the animals seemed grown-up in size compared to the neighborhood animals of Smithtown. Sea lions, harbor seals, and sea otters frolicked, brown pelicans flew in breathless formations, forty or more cormorants laced through the sky like a strand of long, black hair, porpoises and dolphins splashed by the shore, and whales spouted as they cruised up and down the coast. At 2,600 miles from where I grew

up, I was home again in the outdoors. I no longer had to worry about being late for dinner, just cooking it.

I listened to KZSC all the time, a radio station nestled in a forest of redwoods along the coast and run by college students from the University of California, Santa Cruz. The signal came in strong, since Santa Cruz was on the other side of Monterey Bay. As I edited material about food webs for fourth graders in my home office, which doubled as my kitchen, I heard the most wonderful public service announcement between songs. The DJ announced an expedition to Antarctica that was a fundraiser for the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

Right away I looked into the company running it and found that Ecological Expeditions, based in Northern California, had a great reputation for its focus on wildlife, the environment, and conservation. It had a staff of world-class guides and experts. One guide had had a nature documentary made about him. Another, a professional wildlife photographer, had shot the cover photo of a penguin on an iceberg for a news magazine's global warming issue. I learned that people from all over the world had signed aboard. They were serious naturalists, birders, and photographers. Even the head veterinarian of a zoo had joined up. For the people on this expedition, it wasn't about what the ride was like. The opportunities at the destinations were what mattered.

Nearly the perfect solution, the expedition would do all the hard work for me—the itinerary planning and travel arrangements. All I needed to do was come up with the funding, which I did by working even more like a madman. For the cost of the expedition, I could have bought a snazzy new car. Not that I would have bought one with the money anyway.

My friend Ann helped put it into perspective by saying, "This is a once-in-a-lifetime thing. How many people get the chance to do something like this? Car? Cars are everywhere. Who cares? Later in life when you look back, what are you going to want to remember? The cars you had or this?"

The expedition would begin at the end of the year, wintertime here but summer in the southern hemisphere. I had plenty of time to prepare. I did have one big problem with it, which was that we would first stop off at the Falkland Islands and South Georgia. We weren't going to Antarctica straight away. I had heard about the Falklands years ago in the news because of the Falklands War between Argentina and the United Kingdom. But I couldn't recall hearing about South Georgia, let alone show anyone where it was on a map. I needed education about the environment being most impacted by climate change, and I was about to get it. I just had to suffer through these two detours first.

"Fish, Frogs, and Alluvial Fans" is excerpted from Chapter 3/Episode 1 of the multimedia serial novel, The Princess of the Bottom of the World. To read more, visit dslinehan.com.

"...like Niobe, all tears"
Hamlet (1.2,153)

Niobe

by ASHLEY BRADLEY

Niobe sits
because she can no longer stand
wailing for children
who won't wander home.
Rain-burnished cheeks
bronze, numb,
still, Niobe waits.
Her fingers used to tap
to the rhythm of patience,
but sunsets and mourning
birthed pregnant pause
and so, Niobe sits,
with ivy-fettered ankles,
rusted wrists in eternal prayer,
her gaze projects their mandorlas
across the fractured cement:
Trayvon, Sandra, Oscar, Rekia, Tamir,
etc.,etc.,etc.,
and so,
Niobe sits
in Philadelphia
Niobe sits
in Detroit
Niobe sits
on the pedestal
of every urban stoop
because she can no longer stand
the
weight

Burnt Rubber

by TOR STRAND

The sky drips like penicillin.
And the bike tire slips off the sidewalk,
slips out of gear
 makes a world
out of seconds and six inches. The man falls
on the black tar highway. Gravel screams—
head, then body.
 He lies there,
 like the deer do.

"Piece of shit,"
he says when he comes to.
"Knocked myself out a second."

Man of sharp bone,
ribbons of muscle and tattoos,

“Finally found someone who can knock me out. Me!”

He doesn't want us, 9-1-1, our milky words
or forced gestures, our faces
fogged mirrors unable to find his,
unable to feel the gravel dyed red across
his forehead.

"Are you okay?" I'm a false note,
I smell like shining seas and purchases.

He picks up his bag of cans
and goes, everyone goes, away.

"I have friends," he says, "my friends will take a look. My friends are this way."

Last Week of the Month

BY MYKA E. OWENS

The overlapping roars of indifference occurring within my head seemed to echo in unison with the chatter of the block. Tremors throughout my entire body made it increasingly difficult to sit; still, anxieties struck every nerve of my being and rendered me into a petrified wreck. Constantly asking myself over and over again, “Why am I here? Why did they do this to me?” I was a medley of indignation, discomposure, and sheer panic. While my frigid gaze was aimed sightlessly at the fabrics of my jumpsuit that read “BROWARD COUNTY JAIL,” I sunk lower into the chair beneath me. Hundreds of thoughts and scenarios condensed into my mind, sending me into a deeper pit of panic.

I had absolutely no idea what was going to happen to me. With no indication of what was to come, only time would be able to declare my fate. That is until an inmate approached me. He stood in front of me, towering over my slumped body as his dreads covered his eyes. “What happened?” he asked in a dry yet concerned tone. “I was skateboarding,” I muttered. Just then, all the noise from the inmates lowered and reduced to silence for a moment. Before I could even reflect on what I had just said, they erupted into laughter and disbelief. Naturally, I’d feel defensive toward people laughing at me, but I soon realized they weren’t laughing AT me, they were laughing at the absurdity of my “crime” and me being there in the first place. Several inmates sat down around me, some still laughing, but mostly trying to be supportive and helpful. It was at that moment I had finally felt some relief since being arrested.

They would jokingly take jabs at me, calling me “a violent criminal” and “worse than a murderer” whilst also criticizing the police department for wasting resources and time. Being able to express my frustration with the situation while also giving my side of the story was a refreshing change of pace, but it also allowed me to develop a sort of comradery with so many people that had no business being locked up in the first place. Half of the inmates I met had been there for months, whereas the other half were individuals that had just been arrested the same day as me, but a majority of us were there for non-violent offenses.

Obviously, we all shared a resentment toward the people that were responsible for putting us here in the first place. It wasn’t blind hatred, though. We were all frustrated, some more than others. I gained vast insight from people who are often looked down upon by the rest of our society, people whose lives were permanently changed after being put into this place. The amount of morals most of the inmates possessed was inspiring. So many of them didn’t know when they’d be getting out but nonetheless were just happy to be alive. Every exchange I had with someone discussing their arrest, they always emphasized how relieved they were to have not been shot, to have not been beaten to death, or framed for a crime they didn’t commit. This only solidified my perspective of the police department’s

corruption, but it was extraordinarily disturbing to behold the shared relief of not being murdered or violated by individuals who are meant to “protect us.”

A large portion of my time was spent thinking about the excessiveness of our country’s law enforcement. Despite getting along with other inmates, we were often separated throughout the day when we were sent into our cells. I didn’t share my cell with anyone, which may sound nice, but ended up being the worst-case scenario. Time went by slower, my grip on reality grew looser, and my anxiety rooted deeper into my chest. I’d lay out on my cot, staring at my blurred reflection in the bulletproof mirror across the cell. For some reason, I was able to maintain a relaxed composure, yet I could still feel the sharpness of my heartbeat vibrate throughout my chest. No amount of optimism was able to rid myself of the fear I had of the unknown. My life was at stake, my future was at stake, and my sanity was at stake. All I could do was stare at my reflection and pray I was going to get out of this awful situation.

The entire process of being confronted by the police, belittled, handcuffed, detained, fingerprinted, photographed, stripped down, and thrown in a cell was absolutely dehumanizing. The very people that put me in here seemed to deliberately withhold any information about what was going to happen to me. They only give you one option, and it’s to bail yourself out, usually set at an amount that would render someone in financial straits or simply put in a dead-end. I couldn’t afford my bail amount, and they made it impossible to contact a bondsman to help pay the bail. Once that was established, I was whisked away to a unit and still without any information as to what was to come. When could I get out and go home? When could I get my belongings? How long am I going to be here? How do I get out of here? Why did I get a third-degree felony for skateboarding? Is it because I’m black? How are you allowed to do this? Why did they do this to me? All of these questions went unanswered except for the last, to which I was told by both the overseeing officers and inmates, “It’s the last week of the month, everyone’s trying to reach a quota.”



FROM THE FLAMES OF THE CALAIS JUNGLE:

AN INTERVIEW WITH
VINCENT PEAL

The Calais Jungle was a refugee and migrant encampment in the vicinity of Calais, France. Many who lived in this camp attempted to enter the United Kingdom via the Port of Calais or the Eurotunnel. Most were young men from Africa or the Middle East, representing Eritrea, Sudan, and other conflict-torn countries.

On October 24th, 2016, France began the dismantling of The Calais Jungle. Over the next two days, the French dismantled the camp and peacefully transported 6,400 migrants using 170 buses, with the intent of resettling the migrants in different regions of the country.

However, on the morning of Wednesday, October 26th, a series of destructive incidents struck the camp. With reportedly little warning, gas cylinders exploded and inhabitants set fire to at least 100 unoccupied huts.

Belgian photographer Vincent Peal was at The Calais Jungle when these incidents occurred. In the following interview, we spoke to Vincent about his work, his involvement with The Calais Jungle, and his thoughts on how justice/injustice pertain to the global refugee crisis.

- Jacob Anthony Moniz

What were the circumstances that drew you to The Calais Jungle?

The encampment was covered extensively by the media in 2016. Every day, on TV or in the Belgian and French newspapers, journalists were talking about The Calais Jungle. Even so, my friends and family found that it was difficult to develop our own opinions on the matter, or to sincerely understand the reality of the situation. Who are those refugees and migrants living in this camp? What is their quality of life? How are they living? The entire thing was so close, but also so far, from my own home in Brussels.

Can you expand on your motivations for this project? What had you hoped to accomplish when you began?

As a human being, I was curious to know exactly what was happening at the encampment. I wished to meet those people, to talk with them in order to more deeply understand the condition of their lives.

As a photographer, I had the intention of making a documentary, a kind of visual testimony to give people more details about the crisis. That was my motivation. I think that the visual image can, in many ways, be decoded by anyone. A picture captures a thousand words.

What stood out to you when you first arrived?

When I arrived at the camp, I was immediately surprised to see so many policemen surrounding it. Traveling to and from the camp would be more difficult than anticipated. It was impossible to enter without a press pass.

Did you get to know any of the camp's residents?

After one or two hours of failing to get inside, I saw a few resident teenagers entering the camp by a small, narrow path hidden by some trees. After introducing myself, they invited me to follow them. However, I quickly realized that there was another check point and got left behind.

A few days later, during the fire, I met those young boys again and they explained to me the situation in the camp. Despite the excitement, we managed to swap our email addresses.

I would love to contact them now and report on their new lives. Did they reach England? Were they forced to return to their country?

Some of these boys are in the pictures I sent you.

How did you get into the camp?

I stayed for quite a while hidden in a bush until, finally, I eyed a team of journalists from France 2 (French television). I jumped out from my hiding place and joined in walking with the group. The journalists were a bit surprised to see me, but allowed me to stay by their side.

Fortunately, the security men at the gate screened just two of the journalists before allowing the group into the camp. Like that, I was in.

What were the conditions like inside?

Conditions in the camp were poor, typically without proper sanitary or washing facilities. Accommodations consisted of tents and improvised shelters. Food was supplied by charity kitchens, as opposed to government-funded relief.

Once the evacuations started, residents were trucked down the camp's trash-filled, muddy lanes in small groups, pushing or dragging donated suitcases, or toting knapsacks front and back.

On your website, several of your projects are described as documenting “the outcast.” This term is interesting to me, as it suggests that your subjects have been cast out of societies by active and intentional means. Do you consider the occupants of The Calais Jungle to be outcasts?

You know, when you are perceived as “different,” people often have a tendency to make you into an “outcast.” The migrants, coming to France from conflict-torn countries in Africa and the Middle East, are easily thought of in that way.

I acknowledge them as different, being of a different culture, religion, or color. Still, I make the effort to include them in my world. It interests me to discover new human relationships, new faces, new stories. On the street today, I saw dozens of faces, each one with a story. They tell amazing stories. Rugged, beautiful, funny, and sometimes complicated, but always in those faces, another universe to discover.

Curiosity is the key to maintaining an inclusive, open-minded attitude.

What changed between October 24th and October 26th? There were two days of peaceful dismantling before chaos struck the camp. Was there a shift in mood, or were these acts inevitable?

What struck me was the rapid disappearance of the world press.



Photos Courtesy of Vincent Peal



Photos Courtesy of Vincent Peal

They were present on the first day, having taken images of the dismantling for the TV news. Once they had that, they left the camp. The second day, I was almost alone in the camp taking pictures. By the time the fire started, nobody was there. That's why we didn't see those types of pictures anywhere.

These days, journalists don't capture a complete documentary on a subject because they don't receive enough time or money. They have to work quickly to avoid costs for their employer. Maybe that's why there was a shift in mood. TV correspondents, journalists, photographers... they were gone so rapidly, like they didn't really care about the situation of the residents.

Do you think that the burning of the camp was an attempt to find justice?

When I spoke to some of the residents, they told me they were unhappy to see chaos like the burning of the camp because they knew it could be bad for public opinion. They didn't need the negative press. Some were trying to stop the fire, even before the firemen arrived.

Still, we can understand that some of them, so upset by their situation, saw this as one way to express their frustration.

The global refugee crisis is a humanitarian emergency with complex factors at play. There are no easy solutions. However, in the case of The Calais Jungle, do you feel that an injustice was committed against its occupants, or were French authorities justified in their actions?

Like I said before, conditions in the camps are poor. When people are living in that kind of situation, we could obviously say it's an injustice.

But, like you said, there are no easy solutions.

Maybe we should look at the problem from its roots. Why would those people leave their countries, their lives, their families, for an unmoored and uncertain future? For most, it's not a choice, but a necessity. The conditions in their own countries have become too dangerous to stay. War, dictatorship, corruption, and injustice – all are a part of their daily life.

Could the international coalition take responsibility to fix these problems and avoid this humanitarian emergency? Perhaps. In any case, after spending time in the hell of The Calais Jungle, I realized just how privileged I am to live in a western democracy, imperfect though it may be.

Whenever a photographer documents under-privileged subjects, they open themselves up to accusations of exploitation or voyeurism. How do you check your own intentions? What distinguishes the voyeur from the documentarian?

In the past, great photographers such as Weegge, Metinides, Diane Arbus, and others were accused to be controversial and voyeur by most of the media and public. Today, they're lauded as visionaries, with work showcased across the world.

People now understand the quality of their work and recognize the love they had for the people they photographed. These artists were passionate about showing the realities of our society, their work a series of testimonials. I regard them as great humanist photographers.

Our type of work should inspire emotions in those who view it, leading eventually to a state of self-reflection. My photography exists less for my pleasure and more for a greater dialogue. It is in this sense that the work of a photographer seems useful to me.

I usually ask people for permission before taking their picture. Shooting portraits brings me closer to the "other" and allows me to transmit the moments of their lives. It's a way to meet new people who you would never have interacted with under other circumstances.

These meetings enrich me.

During one of my previous exhibitions in Paris, I sold a photo of a homeless subject I had invited. I gave half of the earnings to him, which is a common practice of mine. Surprisingly, he could care less for the money. He told me instead how happy he was to see his face in the wall of a gallery. He was so proud and told me that he had spoken more that night than he had in the last 15 years.

My work serves as a way to socialize subjects otherwise ignored by society. These people deserve respect, rather than their current treatment as outcasts on the margins. They are beautiful, layered, and deserve to be seen.

Vincent Peal has released his second photo book, World News. To learn more, visit www.vincentpeal.com.



Photos Courtesy of Vincent Peal

When the old man boarded the bus dragging his rolling metal basket, laden with groceries, he joked that he had nearly 200 pounds. The driver asked how far he was going, to which the old man replied, "Oh two, three stops, just up to the top of the hill." There really was not much of a hill, but it was clear that the old man would not have been able to drag his groceries that far. The driver told the man not to worry about his fare which seemed sensible, as the man was only riding from one end of the village to the other. But the man, perhaps due to the incomprehension of senility or out of pride, placed his crumpled dollar – 50% senior fare – into the machine before making his way to sit next to me.

In contemplation of that little interaction, I wondered if what I had just seen was an exhibition of idealized communism, straight from an early Soviet film, but I had difficulty imagining a participant in the communist state so easily displaying kindness to a complete stranger. It is exactly such kindness which communism is meant to enact on an institutional level, yet if one makes a concession to a single old man, what about the next and the next – what about those who will fain a degree of frailty to take advantage of the system? From one perspective it is unjust that a bus driver may, at his implicitly-biased discretion, waive a fare. Does the pursuit of social justice extirpate any human touch or kindness, all in the pursuit of banishing human cruelty?

At the third stop the driver lowered the ramp, and the old man began to trundle his way out of the bus. The driver warned him to be careful on the ramp, and the old man made some joke about rolling down it at high speed, to which the driver replied, "Evil Knievel!"

Evil Knievel? In those two words I heard young boys running and screaming in a primary school playground, or perhaps the more ill-behaved among them jumping onto a desk in a classroom and leaping over chairs. I heard them racing each other down the ramp to the school bus, some showing off their new shoes with the wheels embedded in the heel, pulling stunts which would eventually get those shoes banned. And I heard them laughing and shrieking, daring each other on, trying to impress each other, to gain hierarchical standing by showing fearlessness and power. "Evil Knievel," they would shout before making a leap off a park bench or over a curb, their arms flailing about in juvenile clumsiness. One wonders how many of them did aspire to be like Evil. At some point, however, they – we, that is – must have stopped saying this, stopped engaging in ridiculous uncoordinated stunts intended to gain us social capital when status is now something that we could buy. When did that happen? Maybe at the end of middle school? Or perhaps it started, ever so slowly, in high school when some students could afford better clothes, could take the trip to Paris, could afford not to work, or could work, and could go to university. So he had once been a child who jumped off chairs, and now

this Good Man was a bus driver; is this success, victory, or failure and defeat? I remembered how the old man had sat next to me – his nose was running, mucus having flowed over his short cut mustache, and, reflecting upon the runny nose of the old man, I began to hate the world again – it was only the bus driver's kindness which had interrupted the general disposition of things.

As if to prove the kindness of strangers to me, just as the bus was about to leave from a later stop, a woman called out, "Hey wait, that man forgot his wallet!" The bus driver stopped and the woman went running outside. Another man went out to help her when the man who had forgotten his wallet did not hear their calls, and the bus driver blew the horn, eventually unbuckling himself from his seat to run after the man along with the two riders. All of this allowed a woman who was late to catch the bus. Upon re-boarding, the woman who had run out with the wallet explained that she was asthmatic and found it difficult to run – yet still she had tried. If all this was human kindness, then what would institutional kindness be?

Perhaps institutional kindness would be to eliminate fares altogether, since they hardly pay for public transit anyway. If we fail to support such a policy, is it because we, individually are each unkind? Is it not unkind to argue that because I don't ride the bus, I shouldn't have to pay for it? Is that not essentially a prioritization of individual self-interest over patriotism and the self-interest of the community? Perhaps one argues that it is unjust to be made to pay for something which one does not use. And why does one not ride public transit? I have written books whilst sitting in the bus – what have you done whilst riding in your car? After the incident with the wallet, the driver asked one of the riders about an elderly man with a walker who apparently used to ride the bus but had not been seen for some time. The obvious conclusion was that he had died. Perhaps less obvious, is that the man with the walker simply was no longer able to board the bus, and now had to pay six dollars for the door-to-door shuttle for disabled people – a cost imposed rather than lessened by age and disability, rationalized by the fact that the door-to-door service is more expensive to operate. We are mistaken if we believe that a just society is the same as a good one – such Platonic ideals do not, in actuality, exist.

The Massacre of Glencoe, 13 February 1692

by MATTHEW DISCHNER

North of Glasgow we stopped
and John slid the rental into a small lot
overlooking a barren valley
of asparagus-green tundra
and pockmarked rock
empty but for sparse trees
and a single stunted plaque,
before which John stood furrowed.

There was nothing,
no cars, no birds, no great
White Hart descending from the
clouded hilltops to the tune of
Highland Pipes and woad.
Just John, silent before the plaque
as if a larger plaque himself,
equally still and informative.

Leaning against the sedan
watching cigarette smoke spiral
and join the growing haze I waited
for something
but there was nothing.

I

The train was about to pull out of Union Station, the conductor talking and talking over the loudspeaker system so that nobody could make a phone call. I'd gotten on board early and found my favorite seat — the aisle seat at the front of the car facing back. I liked being able to see the faces of the people riding with me, even if it meant looking back where we came from.

The front of the train always has a four-seater, two facing forward, two facing back. A middle-aged white woman took the window seat facing forward, diagonally across from me.

A younger white man boarded the train a little late and was looking for a seat. He would have taken the seat across from me but I stared at him. At first he liked that because I'm sort of cute to guys. But then he felt uncomfortable when he realized it wasn't **that** kind of stare, and he kept walking. If he would have sat down, I would have said to him, *So tell me how the other half lives, because you look like the other half and I want to know how you can live with yourself.* I did that once and it is very effective at getting white people to move their privilege somewhere else.

Am I a racist? Does it count if you hate lobbyists? I really do. Doesn't matter their skin color. I start off not liking them. Hey, this is who I am. It's worth getting to know me if you're going to hear any story I tell. No justice, no peace.

Our rally had gone well. The weather was too hot, but we had plenty of water stations along the demonstration route. More than 15,000 people showed up to march for social justice. It was mostly brothers and sisters.

The speeches were excellent. The organization of the event was flawless — I say that, knowing that self-praise is no praise. Organizing for the resistance is exactly what I wanted to be doing. It leveraged my bachelor's degree in political science and my master's in communications; it paid, although not a lot, and it's what I believed in. I wanted to fight injustice — and our nation, plus Russia, had elected a president who was dishing out injustice by the bucket. The irony was not lost on me that I was having the time of my life because a neo-fascist was running the country.

The train ride back from Washington to New York would be relaxing. I would buy a beer in the café car, kick off my sandals, and if the train wasn't too crowded, put my legs on the seat in front of me. I wasn't wearing pantyhose under my skirt. It was too hot and there wasn't a pair that matched my skin color, which is dark. None of the companies made the right color pantyhose for the African half of African-American. This was a conversation I periodically had with Selma, my significant other. Yes, she was named after the famous march across the Edmund Pettus Bridge. She came by her activism honestly, from protest-parents.

I came by nothing honestly until I became honest. East New York, Brooklyn, 2003:

Me: "Why we movin' closer to Pitcairn Avenue! I don't wanna move again."

Momma: "They raise the rent again."

Me: "They raisin' the rent because they pushin' us out. They gonna sell the damn building when we gone."

Momma: "Well, maybe you daddy send some money. He got plenty. Meantime, that's how it is. If you ever get a boyfriend, don't bring him to the new place when I'm not home."

Daddy wasn't ever going to send money. We both knew that. And I knew something that Momma didn't – that I wasn't ever going to bring home a boyfriend. Or, maybe she did know, even then.

"It's 7:00 at night. Wanda, where you going?"

"The Senior Center, Momma."

"Why? You not old."

"The group *Make the Road by Walking* is leading a program on community activism."

"Why you going to that? Did you finish your homework?"

"Yes."

"Why you going?"

"Why're we moving?"

"I told you, they raising the rent."

"We can stop them. But we have to organize."

"We can't stop nuthin'!"

"Not by ourselves. But as a community we can."

"Hmm. How you hear about this?"

"Shonda."

"The basketball coach. Hmm."

"What do you mean by, *Hmm*!?"

But she just turned back to the sink to wash the dishes from the dinner I cooked.

When Shonda got fired from the after school program (I was the one they caught her with), everyone was angry. She was a great basketball coach and we had felt lucky that a former Rutgers player and WNBA draftee chose us. Both sides seemed to blame me, which made Momma's life harder. They said that I was 18 and getting ready to leave the school – why did I have to mess things up for everyone else!?

The only thing I felt a little guilty about was that I had tricked Shonda into the equipment room. Then, what happened, happened.

I knew my time in East New York was about done. White, straight people, and white, gay people, and white, black people (blacks with money) moved in, and folks like me got pushed out. All of them, whether white or black, gay or straight,

spoke the same language. Their vocabulary had words like *urban renewal* and *community reinvestment* and *local culture*. But no one who'd been living in East New York for his or her life understood any of those words. We understood we couldn't afford the rent anymore.

But I'd become fluent in their language. I'd gotten notice of my scholarship and it was a done deal and I headed to U-Penn. Full boat, baby. Tuition, room, board, book money. Momma was proud as a lioness. She was also glad she didn't have to feed me. Money was tight. She appreciated that I was getting to go to college for free. College was almost an abstraction for her. \$70,000 a year for classes didn't register with her, didn't make sense. But someone paying for food and a room for her little Wanda for four years was something that she was really grateful for.

Every night, Momma would return to a home that felt to her like it was occupied by someone she didn't know. I think, deep down, the problem wasn't my being a lesbian. I think it was that by the time I was 17, Momma and I spoke different languages. I was practicing a new language in my head all the time. It was Ivy English, not East New York English. Momma had no one to talk to when I was home.

At Penn, I met Selma at an *Audra Lorde Project* meeting, where all the activist black girls meet. Was it love? Maybe. We talked about getting married. But marriage was an abstraction to me, like college was for my mother. Selma and I would talk about growing old together protesting injustice across America until it was gone, then getting rid of injustice abroad. I didn't see what role marriage played in that.

II

The conductor came over the loudspeaker so jarringly it brought me back to the present, to the train. We were leaving the station and the car was filled with white people in suits. Natural enough. These were the folks who walked the halls of power. Folks like me walked outside the halls of power, in the streets holding signs, not briefcases. Out on the streets there was a different kind of power. My job was to make sure there was more power in the streets than in the corrupt white buildings on either end of Pennsylvania Avenue.

I looked at the faces of these men as they stared at their computer screens or read their briefing papers or sent e-mails to their home offices. I knew what they were doing — joking with each other about the button they just pushed, the lever they just pulled in service to their paymasters.

I found something to be angry at in each face. That guy in the gray suit on his cell phone — what is he smiling about? His taxes went down because another million people just lost their health insurance?

That self-satisfied, heavysset guy with the blonde hair, wearing a black suit: what's in the e-mail he just sent? Is he congratulating himself and his company that a serial polluter was put in charge of cleaning the environment? Is he reporting that

they will be able to dump their toxic waste in neighborhoods where black people live?

That slim white man with the gray hair and trimmed gray beard. He's staring at his computer with a look of total sorrow. He's crying. What? Why would a white man in an expensive suit be staring at his computer and crying?

There was nobody in the seat next to him. He was sitting by the window. I had seen the empty seat when I boarded the train but didn't want to be next to him.

When I take the train that leaves New York at 3:38 a.m., the coach cars are full of black folk, mothers with children, and some guys. It's a Regional, not an Acela.

These are people who are traveling because they need to. Some are going to relatives in the south for a place to stay while they look for work. Some are following construction jobs while they leave their families in New York. Some folks are truly down and out, panhandling enough money to get a ticket from Penn Station in New York to Penn Station in Newark, then seeing how far they can get before they're thrown off. It's better to sleep on the train than on a bench in Penn. And when they get thrown off, they'll just be in another railroad station anyway, where they can sleep on another bench.

Most of the conductors are brothers. On these early trains, before the businessmen board, they'll give their luckless brothers and sisters a break and let them sleep. I've seen them throw the homeless off at 30th Street Station but give them a \$10 bill as they leave the train.

On the Acela back from DC it's a different world. The train is filled with well-dressed white people, women as well as men. They remind me of the girls I went to college with, who joined *We Are Here* because they wanted to dabble in social justice and had heard about it from Alicia Keyes promos. That usually lasted a couple of months, then they went and joined sororities. I chose Penn because those were the women I wanted to show up, even if it was just for my own scorecard. And there were a lot of them at Penn.

This guy. He looked like every stereotype of the ruling class. Late 50s, relatively fit, well-tailored navy blue suit. It was hard to see his eyes. I think they were blue, maybe green. I couldn't tell because they were filled with tears. But he wasn't squinching up his face the way people do when they're crying. He was typing with his eyes wide open and tears were just welling up and falling down his cheeks. He wasn't even trying to wipe them away. He was completely silent, no sobbing, no heaving chest, no moaning. He typed and tears rolled down his face.

Finally, he lifted his beer from the tray table next to his laptop. There was a napkin underneath it that he used to wipe his eyes and blow his nose. Then he headed to bathroom in the front of the car, right behind where I sat. He was coming in my direction and I quickly looked away so as not to give the impression that I was staring at him. This was out of character for me.

But I didn't want to engage with this man. His sadness was like a prism bending the light around him. I wasn't able to see what was inside him, the greed or vapidty or idealism or pragmatism that made him one of the people who go back and forth between New York and Washington. I couldn't see the *why* of him, the thing that made him one of the sojourners/supplicants/gunslingers who go to the Capitol for business.

Behind me the red light went on that showed the bathroom was occupied. He had locked the door and was using the john.

III

So, here's my biggest problem: I can't live with a mystery, and I can't live without one. Honestly, that's why I think I won't marry Selma or anyone else.

When I first met Selma, I needed to know why a black woman with means took on a life of protest. She didn't need to fix the status quo. Her parents had figured out how to navigate it. Why did she do what she did? Answering that question was as important for me as the fun and conversation and sex.

As we got to know each other and then lived together, I saw the instinct to hate injustice in her. I saw that — as much as her family appeared to have made it in white America — they were always afraid that it could and would be taken away. She was fighting for the least among us because she didn't see herself as that far removed.

The more I understood her, the more I appreciated her. And the more I felt as if I had the answer to my question — *what makes Selma tick* — and needed to find another problem to solve.

I didn't necessarily like that part of myself. I recognized it as selfish. I was making our relationship about **my** needs, not **our** needs. But I needed a puzzle to solve and Selma was solved.

So, as soon as the red light went on I slipped into my shoes and walked over to the empty seat next to the man. This was a huge breach of privacy, but privacy was a myth so the hell with it.

There was a middle-aged white woman in the seat across the aisle and I turned to her in a manner that was totally lobbyist-like, asking, "Is this seat taken?"

"I don't believe so."

I could tell that the woman had no clue if there was anyone in this seat, or for that matter, that there was a crying gentleman sitting eight feet from her.

I flashed a professional's *thank you* smile and sat. When she had turned back to her computer screen, I nonchalantly reached over to the laptop and swiveled it in my direction. I wanted to see what the crying man had been writing. It was a journal.

July 8

*“John, look at all these bottles of really good single malt scotch. People keep giving them to me as gifts and I don’t really drink that much. Take a couple home when you and Marybeth leave. My two favorites are Longmorn and Lagavulin. Take them. The Longmorn is the best, in my opinion. It’s complex and stays interesting for a time after you sip it. The Lagavulin is smoky and peaty and delivers an immediate delicious sensation. **Of course** you can take them. Really, I’m not going to drink them. They can last for years in an unopened bottle, but if I were to open them they’d only last about six months. That’s why I haven’t started them; I’ll never finish them in six months, even when friends come over. Take them. Your friends visit and you’ll have a couple of good scotches to offer.”*

That’s one of the daily conversations I have with someone who’s not there to answer me. My son John died last year. His cancer had metastasized before it was diagnosed. We had a long, losing battle that ended last July. I talk to John many times a day. I hadn’t realized how much of my life and time had been built around my expectations for him. Every time I walk into my basement and see the boxes of comic books, I think about how they were going to go to my son. I sometimes lament that I’ve stopped buying new ones, that we never finished collecting comics that had Jewish themes. I feel empty when I think about the collection of Marvel-DC crossover comics we painstakingly gathered over years of going to conventions. I’ve lost interest.

I’ve lost interest in baseball, which John got me to watch. He loved the Yankees. He was so informed about them, about baseball, about sports. The fact is, anything John was interested in, he learned about and thought deeply and sharply about.

I stopped fencing. I got John into fencing and coached for a number of years after he went to college. But it’s too hard to coach without being able to share with him the crazy antics of the kids in the class. It’s hard to go to Capitol Hill for my job without being able to share with him the meetings and conversations, and fit them into our political discussions.

I miss the level of understanding we had for each other. We could communicate a lot with a glance.

I was always proud of the work I did, helping get the Affordable Care Act passed and, to this day, fighting to keep it viable. But without having John to share that with, it somehow feels empty.

It’s so ironic that I’m someone who spent his career fighting to make sure that everyone could have access to healthcare, but my son died in spite of having the best healthcare in the world. Why did I bother?

He had lost his son to cancer.

I knew other people who had lost children. Mostly the cause was drugs, or a bullet on the street — sometimes from the gun of a gang member, sometimes from the gun of a cop. I had held their hands and prayed with them and marched with them when their frustration could not hold still. I had seen death touch families.

But seeing this white man in a suit crying because he missed his lost son somehow caught me so unexpectedly. I did not associate someone who looked like this guy as being in Death's palm. Death wasn't a guest in **their** houses. The death of a son wasn't the subject of **their** Sunday sermons. Injustice equals death. But his son died, died so young. Where's the justice there? Here was this man, in one of Death's hands, while I stood alongside people in the other.

This fucking guy was writing about expensive single malt scotches and collector's item comic books and fencing and shit that should make me want to hate him. But I didn't. He had a language that he spoke with his son, and Superman, and Aaron Judge, and Speyside vs. Lowland were vocabulary words that were part of that language. And now he had no one else he could talk to.

He was so lonely. I got it. I got it when you were the only one who knew the lyrics to a song that was playing in your head.

I was crying. Not sobbing out loud with heaving chest, just looking ahead with tears falling down my cheeks.

Then I saw the red light turn green as the man unlocked the bathroom door. I quickly got up and headed up the aisle to my seat. I passed him as he headed back to his seat. I didn't say anything. What could I say? *I was reading your laptop and I'm really sorry about the loss of your son?*

But he looked at me as we squeezed past each other and saw the tears on my face. "Are you okay?" he asked.

"I'm fine. Thank you for asking."

He got back to his seat, reread what he wrote, and then closed up the laptop. He took a book from his briefcase and started to read.

I was back in my seat facing the other passengers as we barreled past Wilmington. Philadelphia next stop. They were mostly white people in suits. Natural enough. These were the folks who walked the halls of power.

The conductor walked by. He'd been seeing me on this train at least once a week for the last year and we kind of knew each other and always had a friendly conversation.

"Sistah, you okay?"

"Yeah Al, I'm okay."

"Looks like you've been crying."

"People cry."

"I know, baby. We all do. Can I get you something? Some water?"

"I'm okay, Al."

The woman in the seat diagonally across from mine said, "How about some scotch? I just got this one. Take it." I suddenly realized that I very much wanted some scotch and took it, a small bottle of Johnny Walker that they sell from a cart.

"Thank you."

The crying man was watching me talk to Al. He got out of his chair and walked over. He handed me the book he was reading, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. "Please take this. I just finished it. I'm also trying to deal with a loss and this helped a little."

I took it. "Thank you. I'm sorry for your loss."

He nodded.

He returned to his seat. I followed him with my eyes as he walked past all the people in their seats, kind faces looking at each other or at the passing scenery.



life

BY NOMADECOLLAGE

Paper and glue. 30 x 25cm.

slower than I could bear

by JOANN ZHANG

dear Mother,
it would so happen
words lather before you
now even as they
once languished
and sparked.

it would so happen
you would tear apart
the fabric of being
and weave it to
wispy topographies
you split, the thunder
of gods, you stood

and it would so happen
you laid as God
now
the hermit shell of
a homunculus crawling
for escape.

i miss you

and i suppose
this net of degeneration
is escaped by none.
you only never
feared it, but

i can't claim the same



children's games

BY NOMADECOLLAGE

Paper and glue. 30-30cm.



draw me a leg
BY NOMADECOLLAGE
Paper. 30-30cm.

THE NEVER-END OF HISTORY: FINDING MEANING IN THE WORLD-HISTORICAL MOMENT

BY MARK HOWARD

INTRODUCTION

In 1989 Francis Fukuyama¹ claimed that the end of history was upon us; Liberal Democracy had prevailed in the social, political, and ideological unfolding of secular modernity, and competing social forms could no longer pretend to offer viable alternatives. It would only be a matter of time, he felt, before deniers of this truth would be converted into the faith.

The end of history, as I understand it, is the end of politics; and politics, as I define it, is the process of contestation over social form. What Fukuyama was essentially claiming was that we had discovered a social form that would mark the end of contestation. The end of history is the achievement of justice: peace on Earth, the end of war, poverty, and misery. The end of history is the messianic moment.

Thirty years later, we can safely say that Fukuyama's triumphant, premature declaration has been emphatically debunked and that politics is most definitely still in session. History has not ended but was merely punctuated by an event of world-historical significance—the end of the Cold War—an event that opened up a new world horizon and a new world-historical moment (US unipolarity). Arguably, 9/11 was also an event of world-historical significance, in turn inaugurating a new world-historical moment (the Global War on Terror), and the 2008 Global Financial Crisis was an event of world-historical significance introducing a new world-historical moment, and so on.

We may still be living amidst this last world-historical moment, or we may be living in a new world-historical moment that has not yet been fully recognized. Either way, determining a substantive characterization of the present world-historical moment—be it the decline of democracy, the Anthropocene, the rise of ubiquitous computing, or whatever—is beyond the scope of this essay. The question animating this essay is, instead: what does it *mean* to be in the midst of a world-historical moment? Moreover, how does a world-historical moment differ from a world-historical event, and why is this terminology significant? To me, this question is profoundly political, in that history as a concept is fundamentally dependent on politics (without contestation over social form, there is no history). But it is also profoundly theological, in that to speak of world-history is to suggest—however strongly or weakly—that humanity is living according to some abstracted version of what in the theological terms might be described as a prophecy, ultimate purpose or meaning.

1 Francis Fukuyama, "The end of history?" *The National Interest* 16 (1989): 3-18.

The central contention of this essay is that what it means to be in the midst of a world-historical moment is to be in a state of anticipation concerning the end of history. It means, on the one hand, to be at a conjuncture that offers the possibility of justice, and, on the other, to be in a state of uncertainty as to its ultimate fulfillment. My argument proceeds in three parts. In the first, I examine the doctrine of the end of history, arguing that world-historical events always appear as a promise to end history, but have to date only punctuated it. Each world-historical event nevertheless opens up a historical horizon constituting a new world-historical moment, and therefore a new promise for justice and the end of history. In the second part, I examine the modes of signification by which we attempt to reveal, or have revealed to us, truths about human existence that suggest a/the path to the end of history. In the third part, I explore the various ways in which human beings are subjectivated by world-history, along with the varieties of angst and uncertainty that each world-historical moment brings. I conclude with a summation, and some speculative offerings as to the possibility of justice on our horizon.

THE END OF HISTORY

The end of history is the achievement of justice on Earth; it is the moment of messianic fulfillment and appears in both religious and secular political-theological doctrines. It is the point at which history as a category no longer makes sense, for no new events can occur. With contestation over social form at an end, there will no longer be any meaning to the term ‘progress.’ Happenings will still occur, of course, but they will fall into cyclical patterns of ritualistic behavior—the kind we already experience by working five day weeks, or by ingesting 3 square meals a day. It is precisely this mode of cyclical being that Islamic faith professes to be the true Being of the world, the Being that is not yet manifest—history as “reiteration rather than progress.”³ Moreover, it is on this point that many of the criticism directed at Fukuyama’s argument appear either misguided or are revealed as straw man arguments. The end of history is not the end of time—the eschaton—but rather the end of division, hostility, and inequality—the messianic.

For the time being, however, the world-history is in the mode of progress. This is because world-history, the path to any possibility of an end of history, is punctuated by world-historical events.

Events are, for Badiou⁴, appearance, or manifestation of Being in the world. They are generally, though not always, the advent of something partial; an incomplete revelation, as it were. A truth event for Badiou is a philosophically a transmission from God (or Being) revealing some occult truth about the world.

2 Norman O. Brown, *The Challenge of Islam: The Prophetic Tradition: Lectures, 1981* (North Atlantic Books, 2009), 22.

3 Alain Badiou, *Logics of worlds: Being and Event II*. (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019), 598.

For Badiou⁴, as for monotheists of both Christian and Islamic creeds, truth is not contingent, but our knowledge of it—at least presently—is.

As partial truths, world-historical events are always less than the achievement of justice. They may appear as attempts to achieve this justice, to reveal a complete truth, and to foster universal conversion, but in the world history of humanity, they have so far always failed. Fukuyama's Liberal Democracy is just one example—the French Revolution, the Russian Revolution, the Holocaust, 9/11, being others. All of these world-historical events sought justice as their end, and all of them failed. But in their revelation, they *did* change the world; they produced a new world-historical context in which their unsuccessful claims to justice—proven false or incomplete—produced the need for a new conception of justice, a new truth to be sought out.

Each world-historical event, then, having failed to achieve justice fully, adverts a new world-historical moment: a new world-horizon with a new characterization of justice. We might call this a justice trap, whereby each new attempt to bring about a just world reveals either new injustices or leaves injustice unperturbed in the visible world. In Christian theological terms, this is what the New Testament did in relation to the Old Testament—it produced a reinterpretation of claims to justice contained within the latter, and offered a new set of claims about justice in the present and for the future.⁵

What is useful to recognize at this point is that world-historical events are not simply erased when the failure of justice is realized, but are preserved as part of the fabric of revealed Being in the world. This, again, is a feature of messianic faith deriving from Saint Paul and then later Martin Luther, the latter translating Paul's verb for preservation in progress to fulfillment (*katargein*) as '*aufheben*' ('sublation')—the same verb Hegel would later use to describe the progressive feature of his dialectical method in the service of secularized theology.⁶

World-history, in some sense then, marries with the central concepts of monotheistic faiths that profess the unity of Being. World-history is a continuum of events forming a contiguous historical fabric in which truth is revealed only piece by piece. On the one hand, it is a process of revelation similar to the notion of tawhid professed in Islamic theology. In the world-view of tawhid, there are no contradictions in Being, only in appearance.⁷ Being is either manifest or hidden,⁸ and world-history is a history of occultation which, through the signifying power of world-historical events moves humanity towards prophetic interpretation and revelation.

4 Alain Badiou, *Being and Event* (Continuum, 2007), 513.

5 Hayden White, *Figural Realism: Studies in the mimesis e etc.* (JHU Press, 2000), 88. 6 Giorgio Agamben, *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans* (Stanford University Press, 2005), 101.

7 Ali Shari'ati, *On the Sociology of Islam* (Mizan Press, 1979), 86.

8 *ibid.*, 83

On the other hand, it is a process of messianic salvation similar to that described by Paul in Corinthians I (7:29): “time contracted itself, the rest is.”⁹ Here, world-historical events are not revelatory in the sense of revealing an underlying cyclical Being and time but, rather, revelatory in the sense of fostering confession to the truth of Jesus Christ as Messiah, and in providing conversions to the prophetic truth already revealed by Jesus’ first coming. Conversions are the necessary path to the completion of a linear history that was opened up by the first messianic event, and that will be closed in the messianic moment of the second coming. Only then can time come to an end in the eschaton.

To be in world-history, and in particular to be in the midst of a world-historical moment, is to be in what anthropologists call a *liminal state*.¹⁰ Referring initially to religious rites of passage, and the ambiguous status of people who had not yet completed those rites, the term was later used to describe political and cultural changes whereby the dislocation of existing social hierarchies and traditions produces a state of uncertainty as to the status and possibility new customs and institutions.¹¹ The moment of liminality then, which I think is an apt metaphor for the world-historical moment positions human subjects in an uncertain state between historical memory as revealed and a future horizon comprised of expectation, desire, and faith. The impulse of human beings is, of course, to align these three anticipatory thoughts, something that can only truly be achieved in the *denouement* of world history.

The literary term *denouement* is used here intentionally, for the state of liminality is precisely what is treated by literary texts of 20th-century existentialist literature and theater. In Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*,¹² the protagonists are all suspended in a state of uncertain expectation, waiting for someone or something that may never come (and in the play, does not), or may come in a different form. It is precisely this uncertainty that necessitates faith in theological discourse and leads to misguided claims of atheistic ‘belief’ in secularized modernity, not to mention the nihilistic writings of Beckett, Sartre, Stoppard, Camus, and others.

In less secularized terms, it is also the state that Weber discusses in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.¹³ On his account, salvation is already decided, and yet divine grace can only be revealed by putting one’s faith to the test through a worldly vocation and laboring practice.¹⁴ Free will and determinism

9 cf. Agamben, *The Time That Remains*, 5-6.

10 cf. Victor Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Cornell University Press, 1970), 93-111.

11 Bjørn Thomassen, “The uses and meanings of liminality.” *International Political Anthropology* 2, no 1 (2009), 5.

12 Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot / En Attendant Godot: A Bilingual Edition* (New York: Grove Press, 1982).

13 Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. (Routledge, 2013).

14 Jean-Pierre Dupuy, *Economy and the Future: A Crisis of Faith* (MSU Press, 2014, 92.

being seemingly incompatible, human beings (specifically protestants, in this instance) are thereby caught in a liminal state in which worldly existence must be carried out in accordance with certain rituals, even though those rituals may be meaningless in every possible scenario.

Perhaps this is why, despite our uncertainty, there are always attempts to categorize our present world-historical moment, attempts that fall into both secular and religious categories. On the side of religion, there are the monotheistic traditions already touched upon. Our present world-historical moment is either the moment of incarnation in Christ, whereby the messianic age is upon us, but the achievement of justice (the messianic second coming) is postponed indefinitely. Or it is incarnation through the text of the Quran¹⁵, whereby the final prophecy has been given, and we must now act to bring about an end to injustice, war and inequality. Either way, there will be one world united, or there will be none, and which eventuality unfolds is uncertain.

In secular terms, the story is more complicated; for outside religious orthodoxy, there appear at first to be no projects intended to bring about the end of history. In that sense, Fukuyama may have been right—the end of the Cold War was the end of something: the end of modernity’s conscious attempt to bring about messianic justice. What characterizes our secular world-historical moment, then, appears in the form of unconscious processes that seem to be unfolding towards a forking path of damnation or salvation.

We have, first, the emergence of what Bratton¹⁶ calls ‘The Stack’; the accidental megastructure of ubiquitous computing which, though of our own creation, and intended (though not designed) to serve our social desires and needs may eventually turn upon us for no other reason than that we exist in its presence as an imperfectly subsisting being. In the prophesied moment of singularity, when computing intelligence is speculated to overtake human intelligence and grow at a rate unprecedented in the history of the world, we will either be turned into Gods, or rendered slaves to the machine of our creation.

Second, we have the decline of democracy under the tyranny of neoliberal rationality and the privatization of social life (precisely what Fukuyama thought was *not* the character of our post-Cold War existence). This is an unfolding process that will either increase its intensity in rendering us class slaves to a Capitalist elite and impersonal market forces or will accelerate us towards a new form democracy as collective self-mastery (democracy as an end), as opposed to the deficient and corrupt form of democracy as assembly and representation (democracy as a means).¹⁷

15 cf. Rémi Brague, *The Law of God: The Philosophical History of an Idea* (University of Chicago Press, 2007, 72.

16 Benjamin H. Bratton, *The Stack: On software and Sovereignty*. (MIT Press, 2016).

17 Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams, “#Accelerate: Manifesto for an Accelerationist Politics”.

#Accelerate: The Accelerationist Reader. Eds. Robin Mackay and Armen Avanessian. (Lulu Press, Inc, 2014), 358.

Third, we have the Anthropocene and impending threat of climate crisis, whereby humanity will either become extinct due to indecision and an unwillingness to move beyond political and social divisions or will come together in great unity to face the crisis as one. In this final scenario, it perhaps does not matter whether humanity, by coming together, develops a technical solution to ‘solve’ the climate crisis—a *deus ex machina* in the narrative of world history, if you like—or faces up to their sins against the Earth in peaceful unity and nevertheless becomes extinct. The point is to achieve justice.

Ultimately, however, what binds *all* characterizations of the world-historical moment is the possibility of justice offered by their *denouement*. Moreover, what binds all of the secular characterizations together is the role of capitalism, and the contradictions it introduces into a social being. This may be why Benjamin’s theses on history¹⁸ presents the idea of a classless society (i.e., capitalism overcome) as a secular form of messianic time.¹⁹ It is also why political-theology becomes such a useful method of description: it adds faith and fidelity about what is possible and allows us to question whether what is happening in the world is something new—a miracle, a world-historical moment, and or event—or more of the same. It also allows us to see the end of history as the possible end of every world-historical moment and leads us (intentionally or not) towards and through new world-historical events in pursuit of this aim.

SIGNIFICATION

World-historical events and the moments they bring with them would not be recognizable if they were not marked with significance, in the literal sense of being signifying events and moments. Marshall Sahlins²⁰ describes events as a reconfiguration of signs and determines that it is this that makes them *significant*. In his account, an event is the empirical form of a system, or, “a happening interpreted”.²¹ Each side of his description echoes ideas already discussed in this essay—the former, Badiou’s theory of the event; the latter, Islamic modes of prophetic revelation—and signification, therefore, emerges as a term central to any analysis of the world-historical moment.

In theological terms, all signification is the signification of God as signified. The monotheistic ‘oneness’ of God is unnameable, but nonetheless, all signifiers refer to God as signified in the composite form of the sign. Deleuze²² has the following to say on this point:

18 Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings*. Vol. 4, 1938–1940. Eds. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Harvard University Press, 2006), 389–397.

19 Agamben, *The Time That Remains*, 30.

20 Marshall Sahlins, *Islands of History* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2013), 153.

21 *ibid*.

22 Gilles Deleuze, *Logic of sense* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2004), 179.

“The univocity of Being does not mean that there is one and the same Being; on the contrary, beings are multiple and different; they are always produced by a disjunctive synthesis ... The univocity of Being signifies that Being is Voice ... That of which it is said is not at all the same, but Being is the same for everything about which it is said.”

Thus, what we are dealing with is an inexpressible Being that our signifying capabilities can only abstractly and imperfectly overcome through texts and rituals.

This process of signification is what we might call revelation, the revealing of some eternal truth that has been hidden from us. Whether we are talking about truth events or miracles, Being (or creation) is not Being (or creation) unless it appears. However, this is not to say that the truth is revealed to us as it is in itself; we are not fully equipped for that. The world is in a state of becoming and is not yet complete, and we are caught between creation and revelation: “This cosmos does not appear to be hidden like God seen retrospectively from Creation, nor closed off like man from Revelation; it is neither invisible like the hidden God, nor unapproachable like man closed upon himself, but it is ungraspable: it is an enchanted world.”²³ This, I think, is what it means to be in the midst of a world-historical moment, to be in a liminal state between creation (an event) and revelation (either an event or the end of history), with signification our only guide.

In the prophetic tradition of Islam, signification is a process of theophany, the appearance of God in the world.²⁴ The creed of tawhid (i.e., the essential indivisibility of Being), states that the universe is a unity with two relative aspects—the manifest and the unseen.²⁵ God is always in the world, but His manifestation(s) must be interpreted or will remain hidden. Prophecy, then, is an ongoing process: Islam claims that we must move beyond the Old Testament prophecy.²⁶ God’s prophetic revelation is contained within the Quran, which He dictated directly by Muhammad.²⁷ That text, therefore, serves as an alternative to Christian incarnation: God’s appearance is not mediated by the figure of Jesus Christ, but by signs—literally Quranic signifiers—which cannot faithfully be translated from the Arabic, for to translate would be to further abstract from what are already imperfect signifiers referring to the perfect signified of God. Still, the sign has profound meaning and, through nature, manifests God’s voice in order that we should find truth.²⁸

In the messianic tradition, this signification has already, in part, occurred.

23 Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2005), 235-236.

24 Brown, *The Challenge of Islam*, 34

25 Henry Corbin, *Alone with the Alone: Creative Imagination in the Sūfism of Ibn ‘arabī*. (Princeton University Press, 1998, 112.

26 *ibid.*, 11.

27 Bague, *The Law of God*, 72.

28 Shari’ati, *On the Sociology of Islam*, 84.

The crucifixion of Jesus Christ is, says Brown,²⁹ the decisive world-historical event, an event that will be closed at the end of history by the second coming. The New Testament, which tells of this event, is not simply an addition to the teachings of the Old Testament but, rather, a *completion* of the Old Testament that reorients and reinterprets its claims in light of the messianic revelation. For Benjamin, “Only the Messiah himself completes all history, in the sense that he alone redeems, completes, creates its relation to the messianic.”³⁰ He goes on to say:

“[N]ature is Messianic by reason of its eternal and total passing away. To strive after such passing, even for those stages of man that are nature, is the task of world politics, whose method must be called nihilism.”³¹

I interpret this as a version of the claim that each new world-historical event is an attempt to bring justice—the Messianic moment—and yet each world-historical event, so far in history, has only brought with it a new world-historical moment of uncertainty and disorientation. In some sense, this is precisely what Brown is describing: God, through Jesus, has saved the world by carving out new time and allowing history to continue. The messianic on this understanding is not the end of time, but the time of the end—the revelation that time is now in a state of contraction as we move towards the second messianic coming and the end of history.³² The time created is linear space within cyclical time, and this space in time is the secular, hence why world-history appears as the universal form with which we moderns may interpret it.

Secular signification, then, is merely a continuation of these themes in the language of modernity. Schmitt’s argument in *Political Theology* is perhaps one of the most recognizable in this regard. Substituting sovereign power for the power of God, he re-figures manifestations such as the miraculous in terms of the sovereign’s exclusive ability to determine the exception: “The exception in Jurisprudence is analogous to the miracle in theology.”³³ The point made well by Asad³⁴ is that rituals and other practices leading to the signification of more profound truth do not cognize themselves as such—we misrecognize significance in secular modernity. Furthermore, a secular state does not have as its aim the messianic end of toleration and universal justice, because its *raison d’être* is not to eliminate violence and conflict but, instead, to merely regulate it.³⁵

29 Brown, *The Challenge of Islam*, 33.

30 Walter Benjamin, *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings.*, Ed. Peter Demetz. (New York: Schocken Books, 1978), 312.

31 *ibid.*, 313.

32 Agamben, *The Time That Remains*, 62.

33 Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty* (University of Chicago Press, 2005), 36.

34 Talal Asad, *Secular Translations: Nation-State, Modern Self, and Calculative Reason* (Columbia University Press, 2018), 25.

35 Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular*. (Stanford University Press, 2003), 8.

Hegel's secularization of salvation and the messianic is perhaps the only political-theology (or political philosophy) that preserves the idea of justice at its core and therefore provides a justifiably sound theory.³⁶ As noted, his dialectical method employs the notion of *aufheben* to describe the world-historical truth event and his philosophy is always anchored in the notion of world-history and progress. His notion of the Absolute is, as I read it, the messianic end of history. He says of world-history³⁷:

"In all these occurrences and changes we behold human action and suffering predominant ... the sight of the ruins of some ancient sovereignty directly leads us to contemplate this thought of change in its negative aspect ... But the next consideration which allies itself with that of change, is that change, while it imports dissolution, involves at the same time the rise of a new life, that while death is the issue of life, life is also the issue of death,"

which is, I think, his way of describing the justice trap: each new world-historical moment offers the hope of justice succeeding the world-historical event that failed to deliver it.

SUBJECTIVATION

Though world-historical events occur and are always apparent to humanity, the status of the world-historical moment is always more ambiguous. Whether we are speaking in secular, messianic, or prophetic terms, human subjects must be aware of and accept their position in the world-historical moment if it is, and they are, to reach *denouement*. Just as salvation and the completion of the messianic moment will, for Saint Paul, only come when everyone has confessed their sin and accepted Jesus Christ into their heart,³⁸ so too can secular or prophetic history end only when all subjects have been converted into the faith, and for this, they must be *aware* of their position in relation to history.

One way to describe these transitions, or conversions, might be to speak of new *nomoi* of the Earth, new orientations between the self, and the order that governs it. The Stack, for example, with its accidental megastructure and growing omnipotence, can only be guided towards just ends if the subjects subjectivated by it (i.e., amalgamated and divided into users)³⁹ are aware of their subjectivation and the possibility of truth—any truth—that it might reveal. The awareness of such

36 Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History: The Theological Implications of the Philosophy of History*. (University of Chicago Press, 2011), 12.

37 *ibid.*, 52

38 Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism* (Stanford University Press, 2003), 88.

39 Bratton, *The Stack*, 12.

subjectivation leads to myriad interpretations—similar to that of the prophetic tradition—which in their turn transform the subject and effect a new process of *active* subjectivation—that is, a process of subjectivation where the subject is both consciously aware and, potentially, in control.

To give another secular example, we may ask what kind of subjective belief and conversion takes place in the context of the climate crisis and the Anthropocene. Here, what we are dealing with is a conversion to the truth of climate science and the reality of human-driven geological change on Earth.⁴⁰ The climate, given humanity's fragility in relation to eco-systematic changes is the master signifier of life as we know it. It is a truth that extends not merely to the boundaries of human life, but potentially to *all* life (plants, trees, insects, bacteria, and so on) for the truth of the Anthropocene reveals to be intrinsically entwined. That is: as natural beings, we cannot exist as mere witnesses to the destruction of nature. It is a revelation akin to the Deuteronomic claim of monotheism—there are no other gods!—and fosters what Assman describes as “the pathos of conversion: the passion of a life-changing commitment, the fear of relapse, and the resolve to exterminate the pagan within.”⁴¹ It is to experience a subjectively profound and irreversible transformation towards the commitment that no other truth matters. For those converted to the apocalyptic pronouncements of climate science, the truth of our shared fate surpasses all social divisions based on class, nationality, race, religion, and so on. The subject is now situated in relation to all others as Saint Paul stressed humans would be after Jesus Christ—no longer Jews or Greeks, freemen or slaves, men or women, but simply believers.⁴²

Of course, many human beings have not undergone any form of conversion, either to secular or religious truths. Many live unaware of, and unconverted to, the world-historical moment, or deny the existence of any horizon of justice. This is the state of being characterized by the so-called ‘Theater of the Absurd,’ or ‘Absurdist Literature.’ Absurdism, a term coined by Albert Camus in *The Myth of Sisyphus*⁴³, is a term used to describe the meaningless repetitiveness of human existence. Just as Sisyphus is condemned to repeatedly push a boulder up a mountain only to see it roll down again, so too do humans lacking faith in world-history engage in endless iterations of morally vacuous action. The point to note—with anthropocentric climate change—is that the truth of history (be it a new world-historical event or the end of history itself) will occur regardless of our conversion to the faith.

Consider, for instance, Stoppard's absurdist play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*.⁴⁴ The two eponymous protagonists in this play are derived from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, but serve here as our central focus; we watch as they

40 cf. Dipesh Chakrabarty, “The Climate of History: Four Theses.” *Critical Inquiry* 35, no. 2 (2009): 197-222.

41 Jan Assman, *Of God and Gods: Egypt, Israel, and the Rise of Monotheism* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2008), 124.

42 Brague, *The Law of God*, 67.

43 Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*. (Penguin UK, 2013).

44 Tom Stoppard, *Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern are Dead* (Grove/Atlantic, Inc., 2007).

find themselves unwittingly caught within the master-narrative of *Hamlet*. All along, regardless of their actions and musings, the advent of their death is foretold by the parallel narrative of Shakespeare's ur-play which we, the audience, have (or are supposed to have) already seen and understood. We know, and they do not, that death is coming for them regardless of their actions or subjectivation to this truth.

In the opening of the play, Rosencrantz finds a coin which, no matter how often it is tossed, lands on heads.⁴⁵ "Time has stopped dead," they muse.⁴⁶ "A weaker man might be moved to re-examine his faith."⁴⁷ But by the end, this resolve is waning as Guildenstern ponders: "Who are we that so much should converge on our little deaths?"⁴⁸ The truth is that they were driven by a narrative they were unaware of and, therefore, did not control. But, then again, were they completely unaware, or only in denial? There are suggestions that their absurd existence was, for a while, enough to stave off any search for revelation:

*"I'm very fond of boats myself. I like the way they're --contained. You don't have to worry about which way to go, or whether to go at all--the question doesn't arise, because you're on a boat, aren't you? ... One is free on a boat. For a time. Relatively."*⁴⁹

The situation is similar in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, but now we, the reading or watching audience, are the subject(s) in search of meaning. Alas, just as Godot will not arrive for the protagonists, Estragon and Vladimir, clear meaning will not arrive for us. And this is the point: existence avoids definition, and if we go looking for one, we may well get it wrong.

Interpretations of Beckett's play abound—the characters are archetypes, Godot is God, it is about a particular historical context, it is about the universal context, and so on. However, what it is more important to note is that the protagonists keep themselves busy, hopeful, faithful, and quizzical throughout. This, I think, is a profoundly political-theological point in that we are driven to search for meaning absent of a conception of justice. There is no world-history here. In Meillassoux's unpublished doctoral dissertation, *Divine Inexistence*, he ponders the possibility of a God who does not exist or has not yet appeared *may still* exist or appear at some point—in messianic spirit, he claims that God and justice could merely be what happens next in world-history.⁵⁰ This is precisely the hope of Estragon and Vladimir, and it is precisely the hope of we the audience.

45 *ibid.*, 3.

46 *ibid.*, 12.

47 *ibid.*, 4.

48 *ibid.*, 209.

49 *ibid.*, 168.

50 cf. Graham Harman, *Quentin Meillassoux: Philosophy in the Making: Philosophy in the Making*. (Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 97-99.

Beckett's plays, all of them, are austere in context precisely to make a point about humanity's aimless and useless passion grounded in ersatz morality. Godot is never identified with God, and Beckett is said to have denied explicitly that Godot was God, for everything he knew about God and Godot was put right there into the play. This is a confession of the univocity of being, and of the inability for any signifier to truly reveal the signified God. Beckett's protagonists and audiences alike are driven to find revelation only indirectly, for *to be told* is an impossibility.

The key concept here, I think, is confabulation. It is an image of humanity blindly laying bricks for a road that leads to no real destination, but all the same constructing meaning and purpose in the meantime. In Oliver Sack's *The Man Who Mistook his Wife for a Hat*,⁵¹ he recounts the treatment of a patient who could form no new long-term memories. The patient, now elderly, had a memory function that was intact only up until his nineteenth birthday. Beyond that, he was only able to employ a faculty of working memory, lasting but a few seconds at each iteration. The astonishing thing about this individual was that he continuously acted as if everything was normal and as if he understood where he was and what was going on. He was engaged in what cognitive scientists refer to as confabulation: narrative explanation based solely on the environmental cues at hand. The patient, remarkably, often appeared unaware that this is what he was doing.

The point is that history may just be a grand theater of the absurd. Ayache⁵² speaks of the market as the medium of contingency, which is to say that markets operate by continuously recalibrating the future in the present—the surprising newness of reality becomes the mundane sameness of world-history. I think this is confabulation on a grand world-historical scale.

It is also the absurdity of existence. It is the fact that regardless of ultimate purpose or direction, of ground or spirit, human beings are the conduit between being and value in the world and in world history. It matters not if God exists, because the end of history, the achievement of justice—whether in messianic, prophetic, secular or absurdist terms—will be achieved or not achieved by humanity and humanity alone. After all, in the end, justice only has value in being, and being only has value in justice.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, I offer a summation and a diagnosis. I have argued in this essay that what it means to be in the midst of a world-historical moment is to be in a state of uncertainty as to whether world-history is progressing inexorably towards the end of history, or if we are simply confabulating our way through meaningless, and incorrigibly unjust, existence.

51 Oliver Sacks, *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat*. (London: Picador. 1985).

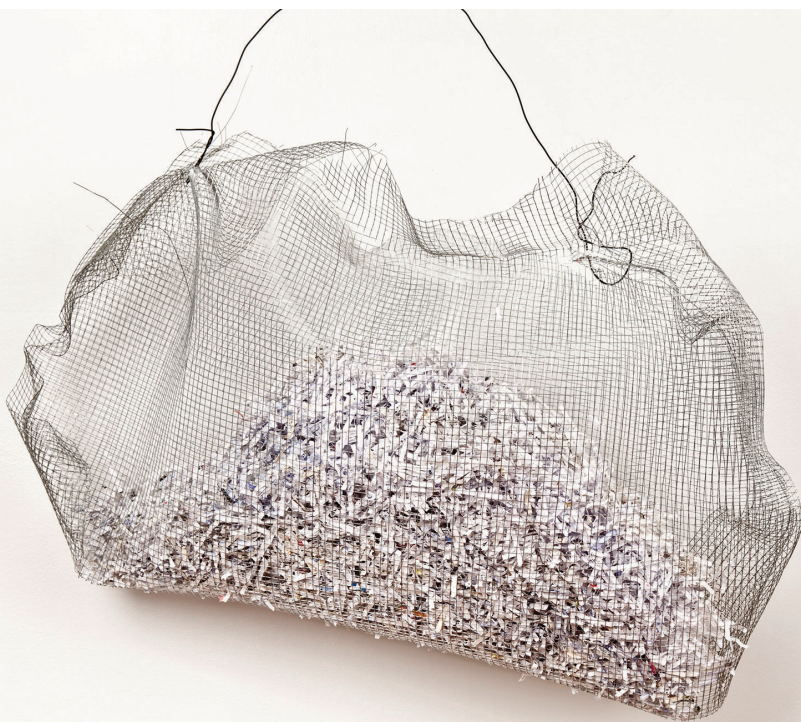
52 Elie Ayache, *The Medium of Contingency: An Inverse View of the Market* (Springer, 2016).

World-history, as I have defined it, is punctuated by world-historical events that have sought justice but failed in their task. Each world-historical event has opened up a new world-historical moment, and with it, a new world-historical horizon with its own novel quest for justice. Until justice arrives, humanity is condemned to drive world-history in a constant reiteration of the desire to achieve it. To illustrate my argument, I have drawn on texts from monotheistic theology, political theory, and absurdist literature. I have aimed to provide a vignette of different approaches to the question of justice and world-history, in order to demonstrate that regardless of the certitude that any individual world-view might have about justice, the only valid response is to maintain faith in humanity. Whether justice arrives or not, world-history depends on the actions and strivings of human beings to continue existing. So we must wait, and we must act. It is the only faith we need.

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I Am an Alien

BY SIGAL BEN-DAVID

*Archival pigment print on FineArt cotton paper.
22 x 61.5 inches (56 x 156 cm).*



Artist's Statement:

The immigration process can be told through the use of two parallel narratives. One engages the bureaucratic process, in which a person is identified by an Alien number and generates hundreds of documents. This narrative reduces a person to numbers and facts, cancelling out the complexity of the person and the context in which s/he exists. A second narrative involves a reconstruction of self and identity in the new place. This work, entitled I Am an Alien, reflects on the question of identity, exploring the fraught relationship self, migration and displacement. Integrating immigration paperwork, a reference to the bureaucratic process.

This work, which speaks directly to my own experience as an immigrant, includes two photographed installations. The first image is composed of immigration documents that have been shredded and stuffed into a travel bag constructed of metal mesh; while, in the second image, the travel bag transforms into an abstract form. This exploration of the metamorphosis of an immigrant captures the cold doubt as to whether the process of immigration can ever be completed.

- Sigal Ben-David

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