







I Love Art

Lisa Carver

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Thank you Charlotte for putting up with me.



Introduction

I wake up a bunch of times in the night. To fall back asleep, I read. Right now I'm on *Shipwrecks & Seafaring Tales of Prince Edward Island*. I've never been to sea in my life, and I guess I never will, not in this corporeal form. At 1, 3, and 5 AM each night this week, though, what is more real about me than the body in the bed has been to sea, with the sights (or lack of sights), the boredom, the scents.

I've known a few murderers, and you know what none of them had? Art and freedom flowing through their lives. You don't have to create. Receiving art is enough to keep you limber and connected to other times and places and visions. Without it, rage—we get mad when we're stuck in a time or a place or a perspective—calcifies in your arteries until violence is the only way to try to crack yourself so you can move and breathe again.

When I've been rich, I've taken myself to the high arts. When I've been poor, the low arts have come to me. I've loved them all. Except the ones I hate. But hating art is almost as enjoyable as loving it. It's still interacting with ideas.

By “art” I mean film, literature, dance, painting, performance, fashion, architecture, conceptual art, comics, made-for-TV life lessons, found photos. I don't believe in the

categories of real art (ballet) and fake art (the Kardashians). Art is like winter: I just accept it. I'm not here to evaluate its worth. It has all different worths. It's all ways to tell each other stories. And any story is a good story.

I've heard that what separates humans from the rest of the animals is our opposable thumbs. But plenty of creatures have them. Gorillas, Hylobatidae.... What we have that's special is the way we tell each other and ourselves stories. We don't simply experience some pain or joy, we anticipate the pain or joy; we build it up and attach meaning. Then it's this huge thing. And as soon as it passes, we tell everybody else all about it so that they, too, can experience dread and sympathy and schadenfreude or envy or actual happiness about something that will possibly never happen to them. *That's art.*

When I lived on the East Coast, people talked about rights and change and philosophers and other civilizations and encouraging children and, yes, art. On the West Coast, people talked about spirituality and fame and healthy food and where they came from and where they were going. I didn't know what they were talking about when I lived in France. I was nodding, pretending I could understand the language, but really I was making the conversations up myself with the one-in-ten words I could catch. In the Southwest, people don't tell me much, but when they do, it's about the past: the wars they fought in and their animals that died, teeth they've lost and can't get the right replacements for. Each population thinks they're the real one. I think they all are. The art each region creates reflects their values, *is* their values, their language.

I live an hour east of Death Valley now. Walking my dog hot day after hot day down the same utterly silent, utterly still streets, the only self-expression to be seen is the toilet someone uses as their porch seat or the collection of deer heads mounted on the outside of a little house. (It never rains here, so no fear of mold.) Internet is spotty, and cable TV seems to have an awful lot of black-and-white Westerns that look eerily similar to the never-changing view out my window. I have watched social media with amazement as the friends I left behind 18 months ago seek to replace a violent, racist, and classist legal justice system with a culling of art, music, and books produced by those accused of prejudice or sexual violence. This burning down of tall and dominating white men will allow the buds on the forest floor to get some sunshine and become what they will. It's necessary.

Still, hungry as I am for art right now, the very thought of joining my faraway friends in boycotting an ever-growing swathe of it is terrifying. To boycott is a luxury. As a child, art saved my life, or preserved and grew my spirit while other forces attempted to suffocate it. As an increasingly elderly lonesome desert dweller, art is an underground spring. I don't criticize. When any comes my way, I say, thank you, and I drink.

Whitehouse

I've been a fan of Peter Sotos ever since I can remember. He is a founding member of the unlistenable (but I listen) power electronics band Whitehouse, a transgressive author (meaning he writes from the point of view of the most vile member of society there can be: a child-raper/murderer), and number-one Yoko Ono fan. I sent him a fan letter at 16. He never wrote back. That made me like him more. I cherish the upsetting quality of the music and the writing. I admire anyone who can be more honest than I am about something unpopular.

Whitehouse is not an acquired taste. It's brain masochism. You either desire to be painfully hypnotized or you don't. I saw them live a few years ago. He was a total bitch. He huffed and threw his scarf around his throat to his back in a derisive manner and would not perform well for pigs like us. It felt like the right show. His art is derision.

His limited-edition books go for \$75, \$100, more. I am spoiled and a snob. In my mind, Peter Sotos will eventually send me or hand me something of his because he will feel it's right for me to have it. I know that's never going to happen, but in my mind, things that are never going to happen are always just about to happen.

Philip Best, another member of Whitehouse, did end up befriending me and sending gifts, like his experimental book, *Captagon*, which samples dialogue from movies and other books and his dreams. It does not direct you towards a specific series of feelings as does writing that makes sense, that unfolds properly. He is a true intellectual. He bored and disgusted my daughter and then-husband when I read a passage aloud to them, to the point where they got angry that I went on until the end of the (super long) paragraph. I think you have to be really humble to know you're going to get that reaction and still put it out there with your name on it. But you can't have fans if you can't be loathed, and vice versa.

Piero Di Cosimo

He lived alone and ate only eggs. He'd cook 40 of them at a time and store them so he wouldn't waste any psychic energy looking after himself and could pour it all into his paintings. Paintings of animals emerging from a fire in the forest, predator and prey side by side, overwhelmed and confused.

Elixir of Love

The female lead had the body of a midget and the head of an enormous person, yet her masterful and elegant and complex and powerful—exquisite!—voice made her completely believable as the minx of the whole town. The salesman, the naval officer, the senator, the poor boy—everybody chased her, and she flitted and flirted and almost destroyed her life and everyone else’s just for a whim. The poor boy whose love is true asked her (all in Italian with translations on screens) why she is so fickle and she said ask the breeze why it dances and weaves. She asked him why he was so faithful and he said ask the river why it leaves the cliff that gave it life and rushes to a violent death in the ocean. It is a mysterious force that compels and you can’t say no. She said she can’t say no, either, so she says yes to a different man every night, and doesn’t stay long enough to ever be hurt or addicted to any one man. One nail drives out the other.

Opera is uniquely beautiful and transformative. I wish everyone would go, especially teenagers. If I had gone at, say, 13, I bet I would have made different choices. I would have wanted more. I wouldn’t have recognized less than wonderful as normal.

We see in the live performance the dedication and humility that goes into making something truly exalted.

The musicians huddle in the orchestra pit at the foot of the stage throughout, and the guy playing the gong just had to stand there at attention for hours awaiting his few moments to hit it exactly right, receiving barely any glory, but contributing to the glory, which would be paltry without him. SoundCloud gives kids the message that you become important all at once, by grabbing at it. Opera will have you proceed slowly and with great care, and you reach exaltation by giving everything to it.

I am worried about its future. My friend Sumner and I were by far the youngest audience members, and we're no spring chickens. I wouldn't be surprised if someone died in the balcony during the two-and-a-half-hour performance. None of his companions would have screamed, because they would be so entranced by Elixir's vixen, they wouldn't even notice.

KC and the Sunshine Band

This is a man who loves music. *Loves* music. And he never wants to stop, even though at some point it would probably be prudent to do so. This man's no prudent! The rest of the band love music, too. Black and white men with their shirts unbuttoned and they're sweating because their whole body gets into blowing that horn or shaking a tambourine or jabbing a keyboard. Every inch of their bodies! The music sounds like joy and cocaine. *An explosion of joy and cocaine.* And a pulsing. An indoor sea breeze. (The unnatural is nature, too.) Grinning and bedazzled men. Very approving men.

Thespis

Thespis was the *first* actor. (Well, the first to step away from the chorus, and engage with it.) Can you imagine when there were no actors ever, just storytellers and dancers, but no acting-outers, no dialogue interplay, then you suddenly step out there and start doing it? The crowd must have thought he was nuts! Imagine being the first something right now.

My research-writer friend Holly Day said that, *actually*, ancient Greeks stole theater from the Egyptians: “The Ramesseum Dramatic Papyrus is full of dramatic works for actors and actresses dating from about 2,600 BC—a full 2,000 years before Thespis.” I looked that up, and discovered that Egyptologists recently had a convention about it and virulently disagreed about the papyrus figures’ meaning. What I wouldn’t give to have been a fly on *that* convention wall.

Whale Songs

I listened over and over as a child to the whale songs that came free as a floppy insert with *National Geographic*. It was so mysterious. I wondered what they were saying to each other. I'll never know. It gave me a lot of respect for animals, and for music that doesn't make it to the radio. It was a huge influence on my tastes.

Recently, someone told me about being below deck on a ship outside Alaska and hearing a whale song as if it were right outside his window, and he looked, and there a whale was! It was so shocking to me to picture whales hanging out in real life, talking to each other or singing to themselves, going along having their day. Whale songs were frozen in my mind from that long-lost floppy insert, in the way a rewatched scene in a movie can *become* the place we've never been to, the moment we haven't yet had (dying, for example). And then one day we go there, or do that thing, and are startled to remember that the film was based on the real and not the other way around.



Figure 1: Whale.

Some Gospel Contest Show

When the contestant was done with his wild song, one of the judges didn't say anything about the performance, he just started yelling about how the devil is a liar, and the contestant got all excited and started singing back to the judge about the devil being a deceiver, and that God is not through with you. People in the audience were crying. I was, too, even though I love the devil and I don't think there's anything wrong with lying. I'm really on both sides, God's and Satan's.

The Dilemma - Earthstorm

Me: “My bill keeps going up and I was wondering if there’s a way to lower it.”

Comcast Lady: [very long pause] “I’m just looking at your billing.”

Me: “It gained a little weight.”

Comcast Lady: “Okay.”

Me: [long pause, waiting for her to laugh]

Comcast Lady: [long pause, waiting for me to die]

After about an hour of that, she ended up charging me 50% less for 77 channels instead of the five I had. I said, please don’t give me those channels; I’ll watch them all. But she insisted, and now I’m watching Vince Vaughn and Kevin James in a one-star movie on a Saturday night. Kevin James is hugging a senior executive at a car show and he’s whispering to him that his soul is too important to take. Is Kevin James the devil? Now Kevin James is dancing. I think it’s written into his contracts that he has to dance in every movie. Vince Vaughn fell face-first in some poisonous plants in a greenhouse and the attendant said he’s going to have “challenging urination” for a few days. Now he’s peeing and he’s squawking and screaming.

Best movie ever.

Oh god, wait. The *next* movie that comes on is the best movie ever. An asteroid is hurtling towards Earth and Stephen Baldwin is squinting at plans while wearing a hard hat to figure things out. A woman with crimson lipstick points at projections of pictures of the moon and graphs with squiggles. People seriously have clipboards.

“I’m just a demolitions expert...*on Earth*,” Stephen Baldwin looks up from the plans to cry out. “I don’t know anything about the moon!”

“You’re the foremost expert in the land,” corrects the lipstick lady. “No one knows more about things imploding than you. And if you don’t stop the comet with your knowledge, we’re going the way of the dinosaurs.”

Now they’re sneaking Stephen Baldwin onto a rocket ship and flying him to the moon!

Next, I learn on the History Channel that the Greek Parliament in days of yore would take psychotropic drugs before discussing politics so they’d be “jovial” and open to new ideas. I’m picturing Mitch McConnell all jovial and open to new ideas.



Figure 2: A Baldwin stares at a globe.

I Don't Know the Name of This Movie, I Just Watch BET All the Time

The old woman said, “Don't you talk to my daughter that way!” And the man said, “She's my wife, I'll talk to her any damn way I please!” And the woman said, “Don't you talk to my momma that way!” So the man went down in the basement and put on some headphones and an instructional R&B song played. Now he's asleep and he's having a dream about rose petals fluttering and I think olive oil and he and this other woman are doing it really slow. I can't remember what any of the instructions were; I got hypnotized.

Hollywood Hearts

A guy and his girlfriend both cheated on each other, and found out. The main guy's guy friend gives him tough talk on how she's a good girl and he has to put down his ego and stick to business. The friend has tattoos and sunglasses on even though they're indoors, and he chides the main guy to get it together. He says, "You got crab juice on your shirt." The woman is at her friend's house and the friend has big nice eyes and she smiles and says, "I'm sorry, baby, what can I do to make you more comfortable?"

The two guys who slept with each other's girls are on the same record label, and they have to make a song together, and the producer doesn't like Bobby's attitude (he's the cheater with the crab juice shirt), and he says he doesn't care what shit is up with them, they better put their dicks away until the single's done. Now the sound man is weighing in: "Don't tell me this is all over some female."

Well, the two singers did get it together and cut their single, and now the good girl has shown up with a gun because Bobby was ignoring her calls. He's on his knees saying, please. She's having flashbacks to every time he broke up with her. And every time he cheated on her. Oh my god! I think she just shot him!

The EMTs came, and the cops. Every single person in this movie is black, all the main characters and every extra.

Bobby survived! He's out of the hospital, and there's a montage of happy times the couple had together. He misses her. She's in jail for shooting him. He composes a sad song on his piano.

He tries to visit her in jail, but she refuses to see him. He says to her sister, "She's crazy." The sister says, "You just have to give her time." Haha, get it?

She's out! As she walks down the courthouse steps to freedom, she sees a bunch of rose petals on the ground making a path, and wait! There he is in the park playing keyboards to her! That still isn't enough for her, until he says the three magic words every woman wants to hear: "I'm an asshole." Then he says, "You almost killed me. Baby, that's what I needed to knock some sense into me."



Figure 3: When your wardrobe consists of sunglasses and a fuzzy blanket slung loosely over your genitals, you know the song is all right!

The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle

I read on Genius Quotes a great line of Haruki Murakami's about falling in love being like finding a lost piece of yourself, so anyone in love is sad. Because I guess it makes you aware that if you can find a piece of you, you can lose it again. Now that's a dark row to hoe. He said falling in love is like being back inside a room you were once in but you'd forgotten what it really looked like, and it's different. Very unsettling.

Two years passed between my reading his quote and reading one of his books, whereupon I realized this definition of love may be lacking. The husband constantly wants to rescue the wife and she wants him to rescue her, but she says, don't. She has an abortion, cheats a bunch of times, takes off, writes him a letter about how much more passionate the sex was with a guy from work. So the husband/hero climbs into a well and psychically beats her brother, who is housing her, with a baseball bat. (In his mind, supernaturally. In the natural world, the brother has a stroke at the dinner table.) And then the wife finishes the brother off in real life by pulling the plug of his life support, and through a convoluted, never-quite-elucidated rationale, this is good vanquishing evil.

I might be explaining it wrong. I read the book only at midnight falling asleep on Valium while divorcing. Everything looked macabre to me on those nights. *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* came on, and I found it desperate and heartbreaking. The dad simply cannot protect his kids, and the kids are nice, but that's because they're still inside a dream. The grandpa is getting rained on in his bed. And the dad is so lonely. I knew it would work out in the end, because I'd seen the movie before. But in my gone-dark eyes, I was superimposing "real" endings. Hushabye Mountain sank in the mist and was never seen again.

Gwyneth Paltrow

I really appreciate the pampered New Age philosophy of Gwyneth Paltrow. I figure it's art because she's communicating an outlook that has the potential to transform someone else's. Her art form is her body, and her tools are grooming that is both unsound scientifically and unreasonable financially. You don't question someone's tools for their art.

Example: private steaming after she's been on an airplane locked in close quarters with the humans, absorbing their faults. I would do that too if I had the time and money. I would do anything.

GP's art is eternal life, hence her snobby, dictatorial, focused take on food and atmosphere. Every time I find out (through my friends reviling it) about some new, ditzzy entitlement GP is trying—\$200 moon dust smoothies, infrared mugwort vagina cleanses—I secretly think, *Neat*. I also appreciated her universally roasted conscious uncoupling from her husband. That, too, is something most of us can't afford. Being rational requires de-stressing, which is *really expensive*. Because GP is protected from poverty, she can see a big, clean picture that our desperate scrambling covers over in scribbles of worry. Which is our psyche's

self-protection, really. Imagine if we did see what is our right, yet it was always out of reach. Better to be blind and bitter against people who do treat themselves kindly. (I am not being sarcastic.)

My Christian upbringing tells me if I'm not miserable, I'm doing it wrong. I think we're programmed to approach divorce that way, and our vaginas, and our smoothies. It's easy to give up God once you grow up, but not His tenet of stoic suffering. I think people are angry at Gwyneth because we suspect she may be less upset than we are, and that is the ultimate hedonism: leisure, pleasure, shallowness. But what's so bad about shallowness, really? It's the surface layer, but it covers the same amount of territory as the layer underneath. It's just the part that's visible. It's a holdover Puritan concept to view whatever's on top, whatever's visible, whatever's easy, as sinful.

Aliens & Anorexia

My favorite books open in the midst of losing battles, when action is seen happening through a window or barrier of some sort; our character is unable to get in, partly due to money troubles and poor timing, and partly due to some irreversible personality defect.

So begins *Aliens & Anorexia*, with the airline losing Chris Kraus's luggage and she arrives late and unwanted and improperly attired to place after place at the German film festival that is her very last chance to get her independent film shown. Coffee is \$3 USD in Berlin. She can't afford a meal in the café so she can't stay there and it's cold outside and there are hours until the next and last possible appointment to show her film, which she now realizes is completely unpalatable anyway, and overgrown with meaning. It's raining. A sense of urgency and helplessness reaches its black arms out of the pages and around your throat. "The Tao of Dereliction," Kraus calls it. "Attaining a state in which you may be porous: mobile, lost, penniless, and constantly alert."

The plot thickens with strange characters (some from the past, some from the newspaper, some not even human) intersecting in unusual fashions. I don't think any of them are in optimum form. They're not living right. And in

their divergent paths, they find things we never thought possible. There is Simone Weil, the anorexic French Marxist kamikaze philosopher. She waits and waits. A group of sad Californians pursue a meeting with aliens. They give up their jobs and their cars and make themselves pure. They, too, wait and wait. At last they pick a day and a special spot and hold hands and this is when the waiting will end. No one comes to take them away. An unnamed narrator, who we know is Kraus, is having a mirage affair with an alien who turns out to have problems of his own—he, too, is anorexic. In all these stories, what lies at the bottom of the decline is ecstasy. When you've been exposed as a fraud and a fool in every way you feared, there's nothing left to prove, and nothing left to hope: Now you can see what's real. Get rid of the foul body, mystics have advised. Lose yourself. You are the barrier.

As our misfits become frail, they stop rejecting messages merely for being ridiculous or contradictory. They're open. They grasp meaning in found postcards the way the rest of us do in mature relationships.

Sometimes sadness is so great, one must turn one's life into a parable just to be able to bear it. We're not as weird as these characters, but we've all known the feeling, and we watch the sky with them for their savior-aliens who will never come. We know these people are more than the losers they appear to be; we know they're not not-at-all-special people thinking they're special. There's got to be a third way, besides success and failure, and slowly Kraus names it.

Reading *Aliens & Anorexia* is like drinking cream: so rich you can only take one page at a time. It kept distracting me

from itself. I had to get up and leave the book, possessed by some new idea I wanted to be alone with. Things like: the deliberate life versus random life versus the deliberately random life.

Human beings are lonely, mostly because we lie. We become alcoholics or corporation men or good wives and mothers in order to lie to ourselves, to pretend to be this thing we saw and were jealous of because it seemed more sure a way than we'd been going. It gets complicated. Honest people bring things to such a basic level, it is impossible to lie to them; they don't hold up their end of the bargain, where they pretend to believe you while nodding and waiting for their turn to lie.

I once eavesdropped for an entire dinner on four well-dressed college graduates. They talked about driving, parking, how silly their parents are. Every piece of information was to convince themselves and each other that they're normal, their experiences and perceptions are the same as everybody else's. They didn't *listen*. Kraus listens to her characters. She ventures all, and still gains nothing. But she knows what she knows, at least. It's all hers. She is honest, and it makes her difficult and disliked. No wonder they didn't want her at those filmmaker parties in Germany. (Oh—all these stories are real.) Successful people are welcomed not so much because people are foolish enough to believe success can be caught like the flu, but because the recognized-as-right people follow the rules, and we're all trying to follow the rules, and the successful person's achievement convinces us that we're not making a big mistake, sticking to the path.

Kraus makes us wonder exactly that: Did we make a terribly wrong turn? There is panic in even contemplating that question. But there is no wrong path, Kraus tells us vehemently; everything can be understood. Invisible connections can become visible. Open your eyes. The panic is still there. It's the price of the ticket. No one said this was going to be easy.

Baby Boy

This young guy in no shirt smells something delicious and walks into the kitchen with a smile on his face. A big, muscular, tattooed, shirtless guy in bicycle shorts is cooking breakfast. The smile fades. Young guy leaves and goes into another room featuring a brand-new 99-inch TV. The big guy comes in and climbs on the bed behind him and explains how to use the remote and claims he can explain anything to the young guy—it’s “all reruns” to him. He’s been in prison for ten years. This is young guy’s momma’s new man. So he goes to complain to his mom, and she says it’s time for him to fly from the nest. He says, “*You* never flew from the nest! This is grandma’s house!”

Two women garden with two little kids. One’s complaining about her man, the other says a man can get you so high, and he can hold you down so low, for so long. And that’s just life. As long as he’s still got something for you, you’ll do anything for him. But when you get so low you can’t give anything more to your babies and yourself, you got nothing left to give him, so you gotta get out. Then a very sophisticated lady shows up and snatches one of the babies, who starts crying, and the complaining lady (the baby’s dad’s new woman?) points at her own breasts, as a kind of fuck you, but I don’t know exactly what kind.

Maybe she has no baby and she thinks they sag less from lack of nursing.

Everyone else calls women bitches but Sweet Pea doesn't want to so he calls them unstable creatures.

“Didn't I tell your black ass to put a block on this phone a week ago?!” says a guy to a woman. Then the guy in prison calls back and we see who it is: It's Snoop Dogg. Literally two seconds later the guy who wants the block on the phone is fixing a bicycle and his friend tells him he has to get baptized.

Cairo

I still have pen pals. One of them, Brian, just got his life wrecked. After the devastating breakup of a 16-year relationship, he dove right into another one that turned scary and he had to run away. He was accepted to an internship in Oregon, quit his job and lease...and then they took their acceptance back! He met some Egyptians in NYC and they said come to Cairo and stay with us, and he said okay. He took the money he was going to use for eight months in Oregon and spent it on eight weeks in Cairo. There he met a wild mix of traditional Muslims and free-spirited feminist artists. Female genital mutilation still happens there! It's illegal, but is done anyway. You can be arrested for kissing your girlfriend in public. More likely you'll just be harassed.

Anyway, the artists are really thriving. He sent me photos; they put art into anything! Pots, walking sticks, walls, scraps of paper. There is a feeling of weightlessness in these depictions. Lovers float, kissing in the air. What is denied in the flesh blooms in the mind—appreciation and awareness of what is threatened. Kisses aren't that nice on our American streets or canvases. (I would say the American canvas is the movie screen, or no...now it's our phone screen.)

My friend wouldn't have found out about all this, and he couldn't have told me, and now I couldn't be telling you, if he hadn't had his life blown up. You just *don't* find out about another world if yours is running alright. If you believe we only have one life, then one configuration of it getting ruined just means there's one more version you're going to get to fit in.

Robert Wilsons

I went to the used bookstore and said I'll take a book by any Robert Wilson: the conspiracy theorist, the spy novelist, or the weirdo playwright. Turns out those fine Robert Wilsons were all sold out, but there's *another* one who wrote about a homeless Irish fellow living in England, with razor-sharp intelligence and better-than-average looks, regaling the other homeless folk with his tales of the underbelly.

(Get too close to him in a hot debate and he'll whip that five o'clock shadow right off your face.)

(Razor-sharp, yuk yuk.)

A quadrangle of Wilsons.

Loopers

Why do none of the reviewers care that in *Loopers*, Joe had sex with his mother?

If you believe—I do, why not?—in concurrent streams of reality, then time travel is already here, and each time you make a choice, you create a new past. (Only squares think time moves in just one direction.) So Joe wasn't the Rainmaker's *dad*, as some have proposed. He *was* the Rainmaker, all grown up. He was one possible future.

Evidence: The kid says he just wants a gun of his own, and remember the Gat Boss found Joe when he was just a kid and gave him a gun, “the only thing of his own”? He said he gave him what was his, meaning he doesn't think he gave it to him at all (if you believe Malcolm X that you can't give a man his freedom because it's already his). And Joe didn't remember his mom, but when the prostitute was stroking his hair, he said, that's how my mom did it. The prostitute lady had a kid who Joe told her to go take care of, but the prostitute said she had to work. The Rainmaker's mom abandoned him (left him with her sister) while she partied and worked until the sister/aunt (who he thought was his mom) was killed in front of the Rainmaker kid. Joe's mom was killed (or so he thought) in his childhood.

But Joe wasn't telekinetic, you say, so how could he have been that most telekinetic of all beings, the Rainmaker? Well, we know Joe told his buddy it's uncool to demonstrate your powers. He may have just suppressed it, after the traumatizing experience of watching people's heads burst from him doing it too much.

If you still don't believe in a hydra reality, argue with *this*:

I'm a fancy person, I'm a fancy person, I'm fancy-dancing, only I'm not really here, because you're dreaming, you're a fancy person dreaming, dreaming me.—Sadie, 10 y.o.

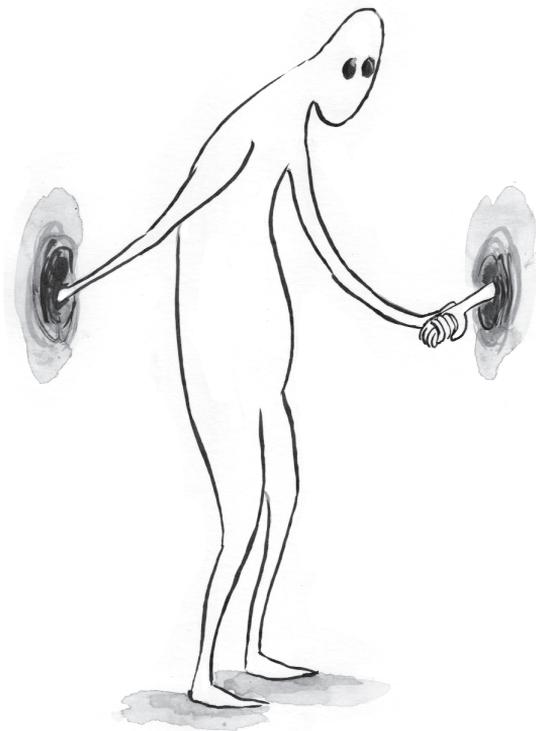


Figure 4: Lonely looper.

Alexander Theroux

When I was 18 I was courted by the prize-winning author Alexander Theroux, who was about 50. I'd try anything twice. So, I arranged to meet him at a really expensive restaurant. I had my roommates book a table at the same time and keep an eye on me. They were heroin dealers, that's how they could afford it. I overheard them ordering duck, which I did not even know was food until that moment.

Alexander had a hairy chest shooting out of his blazer and he showed me a picture of the bearskin rug in front of one of his home's fireplace. He is the brother and uncle of several famous Therouxes, with whom he cannot seem to get along. I never did read any of his books, as I believe what we write is exactly like how we are and vice versa, and that was a dreadful piece to read over dinner.

Living Barbies

There's no reason to be snarky about it. I think it's interesting that someone would want to change their brain along with their body, choose a different way to be. Most of us never make half the choices some of these women (and at least one man) do about their identity. Most people just accept what they're told is who they are and where and how and even why they'll live. There's nothing wrong with being satisfied with how you're raised and how you're seen, and there's nothing wrong with doing something about it if you're dissatisfied. We are coming to understand how gender is largely a societal construct: why not even being a human being?

If you allow yourself to contemplate identity as illusion, or at least constructed, then being a doll is no stranger than anything else we think we're being—you just get less people agreeing with you, is all. People who choose an identity other than what's been bestowed upon them say they're not making themselves who they turn into; they're revealing what was already there. Sculptors say the same thing. Editors do, too. All art is seeing, unseeing, and re-seeing what is the nature of someone or something, and of being.

I read an interview with one Living Barbie who hypnotizes herself and studies to be brainless. Among other

things, she was trying to unlearn how to drive. I wondered if with each skill she eschewed, certain others grew, became more concentrated. Like how if you go blind, your other senses get stronger. Or at least you notice things differently. Of course, it's impossible for someone with a brain to not have a brain. "Brainless" is a different way to have that brain, a different way to use it. Trying to be like a plastic figure is also not "bodiless." It is a different way to have a body.

Practicing having no thoughts is not the opposite of feminism. It's...I'm not sure what it is. Is that a monk? Anyway, practicing anything all day long is admirable, will lead to *something*—and that includes practicing nothingness. Living Barbies say they find sustenance just in air. I don't think that's possible, but a lot of things that happen aren't possible. I read about a guy in India who survived for about a hundred years in a cave just from sucking dew off rocks and maybe ingesting an occasional mushroom.

In an unrelated Yahoo comment, a lady explains (what I interpreted as) passing the Art As Life movement and going straight to Art As Death:

I encourage you to control your image and choose all who provide truth to world and be prepared for all life events including your death I am selecting whom will be allowed to perform my autopsy and intend to be frozen so that they can bring me back to life later in fact I plan to not die ever and work on life extensions –

I didn't clean up her punctuation as I find grammar to be the least important element of communication (earnestness/horsepower being the most important). I particularly appreciate that she ended on a dash instead of a tamping-down period.

Crank Sturgeon

The air was dank. The guy had a contact mic on and a bag over his head decorated with fish eyes. He pulled props out of his pants. He was truly dedicated to his absurd act. You could tell he'd practiced and practiced. He blew up a balloon hidden in his shirt to make himself pregnant, then when the balloon burst, a dead baby (plastic) fell out.

Can you imagine the reaction of his family or girlfriend or friends when he was starting his career out? Or even now? No one makes money with this kind of thing. You're not even going to get respect. They don't let these kind of people aboveground. Where except in basement shows do you find a whole bunch of people experimenting with film that's not film, music that's not music, and a circus act that would never make it at the circus?

Shia LaBeouf

I don't care much for his movies, but he may be the greatest Happenings artist of this century. He just puts himself in situations and then waits to see what he'll learn from them or what someone else will learn: no expectations. He's kind of an asshole, kind of brilliant, and kind of pathetic. He's like every man I've ever loved.

Something went wrong during his #IAMSORRY installation. He was silent and crying next to a table of some whiskey and toys—that was his show—and audience members filed in one by one with only one instruction: Do whatever you want. One woman chose to rape him. Him with his missing tooth and his tears and his silence.

He didn't press charges. He just talked about it in an interview, answering a question. So all these people read that and said he was pretty much hoping to be raped because he let himself be alone in a room with the stranger-woman and he didn't stop her, or that he couldn't be raped because anything that happens in performance art is performance art, or that he just wanted attention, or—I can't go on listing these things, it's too upsetting. I do want to point out people say the same thing about prostitutes who get raped. Or wives. Or prisoners. Or people who go to parties or go

to people's houses or boats. Very few hetero men will talk about being in a weak position or being hurt or confused or wrong, and I do think the ridiculing of Shia for his flailing is sexist.

I never am annoyed by what he does. People call his plagiarism "being a douche." But when a person asks themselves, what is art, what is capitalism, who owns ideas, who owns images, and then explores our distribution system of storylines and images and voice, they might do some plagiarism just to try it out. What's with the shock and outrage, Dan Clowes? Shia was so obvious about the wholesale theft, couldn't Dan see he wasn't trying to get away with anything? As an artist, I would be embarrassed to have my lawyer send another artist's lawyer a letter saying he's out of control and must stop being "improper" and "outlandish" and must "redress his wrongs." A performance artist never redresses his wrongs! He just goes out and makes new ones. (Shia plagiarized his apology letter too, by the way—from Alec Baldwin.)

Here's Shia in *Interview* magazine in November 2014:

The only thing my father gave me that was of any value to me is pain. The only time my dad will ever talk to me is when I need him at work. He knows to pick up the Skype phone call, and he knows what I'm looking for. It's not to say 'Hey, Dad.' We manipulate each other. We service each other. I use him when I go to work. It's not a real conversation; it's just an excuse to rev up. He's the marionette

puppeteer. My dad is the key to most of my base emotions. My greatest and my worst memories are with my father, all my major trauma and major celebration came from him. It's a negative gift. And I'm not ready to let go of it, because anger has a lot of power.

In 2018, Shia said he is making a biopic of his life, and he chose to play his dad. That would be like *me* playing *my* dad. The thought of it makes me want to vomit. But when Shia got that thought, he said to himself, "JUST DO IT!"

Guess what his (French-Cajun) dad had for a job? He was a clown. Imagine your dad coming home from work and you're on tenterhooks wondering if he's going to be nice or start beating everybody, except now imagine him walking in the door in his clown getup. He'd also make the other members of the family dress up like clowns and go sell hot dogs with him.

An Australian friend of mine spotted Shia in the wild. Well, in a queue. My friend was hesitant to speak to him; instead, he simply basked in the "weirdly intense kinetic and sexual life force" Shia radiated. "He exuded vitality, almost to an unhealthy degree. It was like his body couldn't contain him." I also read, over and over in the news, reference to his powerful odor.

There are videos of Shia fending off men who come to his public cam to say neo-Nazi propaganda. He sings one guy down, pogo dances a Holocaust revisionist out of the picture, and shoves off the arm of another who embraces him and says right near his ear, "Hitler did nothing wrong."

YouTube commenters try to find demeaning things to say about him, but you really can't. He's an art god. They had to make stuff up, like that he has gingivitis! The cam ended with him getting arrested for assault. I don't think that was assault, man. It was a really weird bird dance he used to conquer anti-Semitism.



Figure 5: This guy loves art.

Billy Joel

Billy Joel left Woodstock early. There were no toilets. He said, “What am I, a bear?”

Can’t you just picture a young Billy Joel, all froggy-faced, standing there completely clothed looking around with disgust, saying, “What am I? A bear?!” I’ve been laughing about this all afternoon.

Another Billy Joel fact that made me laugh—and I feel really bad about what my reaction says about my character—is that “in 1970, Joel tried to commit suicide by chugging half a bottle of furniture polish. His psychedelic heavy-metal band—a two-piece called Attila—had just imploded.”

Billy Joel is a more complicated man than his simple songs suggest. It’s hard to be easy. (Think Dolly Parton’s “I Will Always Love You” compared to Whitney Houston’s.) Stripped, your real self is just a self, whereas if you dress it up enough—with riffs and...something like riffs...the listener doesn’t even know *what* it (the song) looks like, and grows too discombobulated to doubt the song. That’s why Billy Joel gets no respect—because he does not confuse, obfuscate. People who have some discomfort with their own just self don’t want to see someone else presenting theirs as if it’s good enough.

Art I Hate

Graffiti art. I like graffiti, and I like fine art, but I don't care for one dressing up as the other.

Things that look like something else, like a skull and a naked lady.

Primary colors, solid blocks of any color.

“Sexy” paintings.

Modern art.

The classics, too.

Anything where I know what it is, or where you can tell what they're trying to do. People shouldn't try. Never try! Do, or don't. Don't mess with Mr. In-Between.

Things that hang. Non-winter scarves are dishonest. Those drapey ones people wrap around and around their neck and they're just wearing a thin, or even sleeveless dress with it. Arms get cold long before the neck does. Admit it. Your neck is so hot and sweaty and itchy under that thing. And don't get me started on fringe! Oh my god. Hundreds of mini-scarves. That which dangles says you have the time and the money and an eye for things with no purpose. And that you're so secure in your power, it doesn't even occur to you that anyone would dare strangle you with that primed-for-strangling garment. You're taunting everybody!

Art I Love

First, everything I listed in the last category. Then:

Yellow muscle cars.

Things that look like something else, but not on purpose. Like airplane graveyards that look like computer grids or tally marks or a musical score.

Any song on the radio about a song on the radio.

Any song with whistling in it.

Any song with the word “power” or “slave” in it. Even that Justin Bieber one (with will.i.am.)

Every song that says “I want you” over and over.

Any song that says “sorry” or “please” or begs.

Pretty much any philosopher. I agree with them all.

Impractical fashion. There’s this ice dress that weighs 532 pounds. After half an hour of photo shoot, the model had to take it off and put it back in its freezer or it would disappear.

Rude clothes. Yoko Ono’s pants with a giant hand on the crotch. That one Italian designer whose male models were pantless and underwearless. Side-boob. Those hideous mom jeans on guys, clamdigger-length with plastic knees.

Works in invisible mediums.

The cracking sound of things breaking and blood and the feeling of having lost control, of having lost the agreements of civilization.



Figure 6: The ice dress.

Marat/Sade

Marat/Sade is the best musical play ever, and I love all musical plays. My favorite part was when Sade asked the other inmates to handcuff and waterboard him while he gave a speech. If only all philosophers and politicians did that, what a compelling world this would be. (Watching, I felt like a fool, because I'd made a lot of statements almost word for word that Sade so easily eviscerated. Gurglingly.)

The play originally came out in the '60s. I saw it in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, in 2015. The local troupe updated with murdering police and Eric Garner-inspired "I can't breathe" chants. A cacophony of sobs, yelps, titters, grunts, thuds, masturbation thwacks, chains, and splashes—Marat was in his bathtub the whole time—made the soundtrack. Also, cries for revolution.

Romeo and Juliet

Ballet is not my thing. I never did enjoy perfection. But my possible appreciation had no chance tonight, what with our front-row seats and my immaturity. I don't know if it's just these Russians or all male ballerinas, but I was right at *eye level* with their business. I could tell if they were circumcised or not, I could see the midline little ruffle down the scrotum, I saw exactly their butt crack. If they were naked it would have been less distracting. I could have accepted their penises and focused on the story. But nylons on naked parts is both not enough and too much. Plus, I had my little girl on one side and a 100 year old in a fur coat on the other, and I was wondering just how perverted they might be. Also, one guy drew a beard on with magic marker! For the \$114 that I paid alone, you'd think he'd make the effort to grow a real one!

This is Real, But I Forget Her Name. It Was a Documentary.

A dowager duchess inherited a castle furnished with blue silk Chippendales, used only three rooms, and let her three Labradors take over. She “passionately” smoked 80 cigarettes a day. Nicotine stains, burn marks, drool, and worse occurred, and it is said she was very happy. There was a lady nicknamed Lady Kill. She got her dog addicted to heroin. She’d shoot him up. This might be that lady, but I do believe that’s someone else entirely.

This is Real, Too. It Was in the Newspaper.

A guy pulls into a gas station, sees some tails around the corner. Peeks around. It's Furrries! Sitting at a picnic table, having a snack. They invited him to join them.

It's the most beautiful story ever told. You go to fill your car with gas like you do every few days of your entire adult life, and, to your alarm, you spy giant beavers and ducks unwrapping Little Debbie's, and even though you are utterly foreign to them in your shorts and t-shirt and regular life, they say: Come to our beautiful bench.

A miracle is stumbling upon the unexpected, really—that's all it is.

Demolition

I love the way demolishment looks. So full of promise.

(This explains my love life.)

(This also explains my hate life.)

When there is no more what *is*, then there's room for what, so far, isn't. If I'd had a lot of stock during a crash, I would never have leapt out of a window. When something is all gone, it's a relief. Protecting the thing, worrying about it being stolen or broken or rotting, is stressful.

There is one exception: I wanted to cry for the statues ISIS smashed as idolatry. But if I were to follow my own tastes to their extreme end, I would have to look at the videotaped smashing as art, too. (That's the lucky thing about conceptual art. No one can loot what they can't see! No need to copyright it, either. It's not like Coke could come along and steal your non-idea. I mean, it just wouldn't sell.)

I also like how time transforms loss. Abandoned structures overgrown by nature. Stadiums, amusement parks. Puddles form on the ground floor of a closed mall and fish find a way in and make it their new home. Mushrooms are the carpet now. Vines curl around vestiges of walls once erected with such hope and purpose. Echoing privacy. These places look cool and like you will be murdered there at the same time. The unplanned-for makes itself welcome, spreads out: I guess that's what death feels like when I try to imagine it.

The Intellectuality of Athleticism

I'm watching Billie Jean King play tennis. In her voiceover, she says it's about responsibility, and each ball she hits has consequence, and what happens in a single (glamorous) match is a reflection of choices she'd made in the whole past, each day she could have been lazy or psyched out but trained instead. She says her every move is congruence between the body and the mind. I see it. I take sports as seriously as I do experiments in chemistry or paintings in a gallery. I respect the sportswoman's character.

The sportsman looks to me like a precisely edited sentence. Ivan Lendl's spare, vibrant-with-passion face. His jaw unhinged like a snake's in victory. The way athletes talk often reflects the way they move, reflects the way they live. Bruce Lee, Muhammad Ali, even Mike Tyson described tersely and energetically the importance of doing what you say you will, showing up no matter what, and making something beautiful and temporary through your body. Even with regular athletes I can see firsthand how dedicated they are in a corporeal way regarding what they ingest, their sleep, even the friendships they maintain or drop. There's sacrifice in sports and a simplicity and a reining in that I could learn from.

I interviewed a bunch of MMA fighters for an article, and they sucked the hot air right out of me by responding to

25-word questions with five- or ten-word complete answers.
It's like how you don't want to waste energy on blows that
don't land in a fight. They don't want to waste thoughts.

She Cried

Have you noticed that men get erections when you cry, or do I just keep picking sickos? Or is it because I am weirdly distant whenever I'm not being weirdly dramatic, so these guys take their emotions where they can with me? Nah... guys have never (that I've noticed) gotten erections when I laugh with joy. It's a sick, sad world we live in. Jay and the Americans take all the time in the world to memorialize their girl's tears. So luxurious.

Me on the other hand, I'll get my erection when blood flows down the dirty, dirty streets. I only hope there will be a gaggle of young men on the corner chorusing "shalala" when it does, and when I do.

The Bible

Upon her banishment, Lilith moved into a cave in the desert and engaged in unbridled promiscuity with demons, giving birth to hundreds of demonic babies daily. Her babies grew up fast and rushed out to go have sex with innocent sleeping men, and they (the she-devils) were always on top. To keep them at bay, monks would sleep with their hands over their genitals, clutching a cross. Nasty priests! What an excuse to keep their hands down their robes! After all these goings-on, guess who got married to Lilith? GOD, according to the Cabalists. I guess He thought that would be the best way to get her to settle down.

That's just *one* story. This book has a million of 'em!

Black Cloud

“We drank cases of beer, first cold and then no longer cold and then warm, out of cans hidden in paper bags, and the bug bites popped red on our heels.” That is a pretty much perfect sentence. All of Juliet Escoria’s are. She rarely says “are.” The bug bites *popped* red. Doesn’t the image flood you, and the feeling? And they didn’t just pop red willy nilly, but “on our heels.” Now you know they have no shoes on. It itches so much on the heel. I am amazed at the exact choices she makes with every word. I am flattened with admiration. While she’s laid out all the coordinates on the map, there’s unexplored territory in between. Naturally, you fill in the blank spaces as you read. And then you feel admiration for *yourself*.

“He was one of those that came here from somewhere else, and saw everything as great, waking just about every day to declare it a beautiful morning,” she writes nastily and judgmentally. God, is it a pleasure to hear someone’s pure and unchecked nastiness. She looks down on him because he doesn’t notice what’s sinister in the weather, in the sea, and his unnoticing becomes tyranny. It does! What people don’t see they take as objective fact, and demand we all don’t see it.

Black Cloud has only 138 pages, but being double-spaced and large-fonted with obese margins *and* having lots of blank pages, really it's more like 50 pages. It is hard when you make perfect sentences—any more than 50 pages will kill you. I could only handle reading two pages at a time. Imagine writing it! I was thinking/remembering/projecting so many things with every sentence. It's one of those books that makes you want to change your life right now, run away, or, I don't know, do anything. Meet a stranger. Or you just re-look at what's there right now with stranger-eyes.

It is a tragedy that most books are as long as they are.

Lego: Inventive Toy or Instrument of Torture?

My ex-husband came over and started telling me about this documentary. It's two-and-a-half hours of Lego injuries, including one where a Lego grafted onto a bone. The ex has been listing various Lego tragedies for about two-and-a-half hours now. I actually really enjoy these stories. One kid said, "We went to bed and left our Lego Castle up, and when we got up in the morning, Dad was in the ER."

The Outsider

Evil is compelling. And when you dig down in it, the more interesting it grows, and the more sense it makes, until at some point it's no longer evil at all. Freedom loses its fantasy. It turns, and you see it is only free fall. It turns again, and you see it is only inevitability. To be recognized, such as the DA and the criminal do each other in this book, is a thrill and a terror, it is falling in love, it is going to your death, it is finding your father and he is your child.

This book is masterful, is magnificent, makes you want to do things you've always wanted to do, but really do them, do them right now. It is such a surprise to be as affected now by a novel as I was in my youth by *The Brothers Karamazov*. I thought that was a one-time event. This book excites me to read, to write, and it excites me about life, about what lies in the hearts of men, and by men I mean every kind of man, and every kind of woman. I look around me with X-ray eyes. I feel so keen. The machinations and compulsions of society are amazing.

(I never read Richard Wright before because James Baldwin said he was hateful and racist and resistant to change, and I trusted Baldwin, but now I think he was just jealous!)

(I'm jealous, too.)

Gyna Bootleg

So, there was a gal chained immobile with her naked vagina hanging over a keyboard, but she doesn't play it with her vagina, as she is just hovering there unable to do anything. (Prerecorded music played.) She also had a gas mask on. I hated all of it. Virulently. And have been trying to figure out why ever since. I think it's because there's already a certain inertness to woman's place in this world. This was not dramatizing it; it was just going along with it. There was no way anything was going to happen. I mean, the guys could have gone up to her and stuck a bottle up her, like when Yoko Ono had people come up to her still and silent body and cut a piece of clothing off. But Ono made that happen. The actions were done by other hands, but she was the electricity causing movement, her will was the catalyst. (To be plain, she gave out instructions on index cards.) This chained and gasmasked body instructed nothing.

The BDSM world is like in cement. Everything is so predictable. She was safer hanging chained there in that basement with hanging out vagina than is a preppy girl walking down the street at noon. A guy would not just hang his penis over a keyboard and everyone watch and feel like that was transgressive. A penis is just not enough to be a

centerpiece. It's pathetic that as a culture we think a vagina is. Don't we get enough of women as objects, as our still parts being enough, in the overground?

I love vaginas. I love an energetic stripper. It's a talent. I love a slut. I love fashion. I hate passive...like...a woman turned into a living photograph. Mostly because what I love is when you don't know what will happen next. Historically, in portrayal, men do and women are. I want to *do*. I want to *do* all over the place! *Do* something with your vagina, Gyna!

Corpuscle, who also played that night, similarly had no mark to hit, but they didn't-hit with vibrancy. Ian sang somberly in a sore-throat fashion, then he lit a cigarette and smoked it menacingly, staring. He was staring at people with a terrible expression on his face and it was just strange to keep on smoking instead of singing and you kept waiting for something to happen, and it might have, but it never did. But that feeling is good enough for me—not knowing what will happen next, vividly, *is* something happening in art. Do you know what I mean? Several girls there did not. They were on their phones.

Every great performance I've seen in this genre (performance art/industrial/experimental/no wave), male and female, turned out to be someone working out childhood trauma, and I think the feeling was the same with every person: "Look at what happened to me. Look at what I am. I'm a monster. I'm hideous, don't look at me. Look at me. I'm also more than what happened. It was just chance. It could happen to you. You are a monster. I also am what happened,

and fuck you, and fuck you, and fuck you I'm going to kill you. Am I attractive? I love being alive. I want to die.”

I am uncharacteristically demanding about this genre because it has a lot of meaning for me. But why should I feel such authority, that I think everyone has to work in a manner that feels right to me? I was being a prude about Gyna—meaning I drew boundaries around what is acceptable—and a hypocrite. Maybe *that* is what Gyna did with her performance. She got me all worked up in a negative fashion until I questioned my own deep inside. Maybe. Maybe that was an accident. Accidents are art, too.

Egg, Eggs

After my set, I did something so rude: I packed up and didn't stick around for the next act, Egg, Eggs. It was already 10:30 and we had a four-hour drive to the next place. I wanted to go to bed. I misheard Jen playing Beethoven on her violin to warm up as Andrew Lloyd Weber's "I Don't Know How To Love Him," so I paused on my way out to listen and whipped out my big wad of cash and began lustily counting it. Frontman David stepped out of a shadow and intoned, "That is the sweat of my brow," and he wiped his forehead and flung it at my wad, but it hit my face instead. I decided it would be best for me to stay from now on. (We were on tour together.)

In Massachusetts, out of nowhere the drummer began mauling his kit. He shoved the stick in a crack in the cymbal and tried to break it, but cymbals are tough. So he threw it like a Frisbee. Someone could have lost an eye. He picked it up and jumped on it, and David inexplicably wrapped the guitarist in a bicycle tire like a hula hoop, then climbed in with him and moaned, "Sex is a bore let's do it again, sex is a bore let's do it again, sex is a bore let's do it again: It's better than talking." Cat meows on keyboard, or tape loops.

In a barn in Maine, it started off with a melded pulsing of instruments so quiet and unobtrusive it was a while before I

realized it had started. (Like Can.) Other people, according to their level of inebriation, began to realize, too, that it had started, and they quieted down and waited for the get-going part. But it never came. David, an imposing, big, tall man, was waiting, too. He stood in the middle of the barn pacing and looking around, looking like a lion. My row (the front row) started getting nervous. There just kept on being waiting, and that low pulsing, and we all got nervouser and nervouser. More pacing. Then David picked up a 20-foot pipe balanced in the rafters and banged it against another long metal pipe (for fishing bugs out of pools?). We all startled. He began banging anything, and I was worried he would break the barn. But his eye caught a child's wooden toy and he picked it up and cuddled it. This big man curled up on the floor around the wooden pull dog and sang it a lullaby. We were uncomfortable with this display.

The music grew raucous. The fellow sitting next to me, who had been talking all forced-painting long (where I made people stare into each other's eyes and paint), now was talking really loudly over the lullaby about how he was going to take that guy's bass because he was running it through a Peavey amp—"Walkman false inclusiveness." (I couldn't really understand, but he was impassioned.) He kept on talking about it, and then David stood up and pointed impressively at him with his whole arm, and yelled: "HE THINKS WORDS MAKE THE MEANINGS! HE THINKS WORDS MAKE THE MEANINGS!" Over and over. And it is true. That fellow *did* think words make the meanings. He could barely paint his partner's soul's portrait earlier, because he wouldn't shut up long enough

to see. “You see with your eyes, not with your mouth!” I’d instructed him, to no avail. Well, he did listen to David, and he knew it was true, because he chanted back at him: “I *do* think words make the meanings! I *do* think words make the meanings!” And the two men were yelling-chanting in agreement in each other’s faces.

This story continues, and I haven’t gotten yet to my favorite part of any story, which is a guy taking his shirt off, but it’s 2 AM and you’re going to have to finish this story on your own. Or come to the next Egg, Eggs show, and make the story with you in it.

For Colored Girls

A couple years ago this movie came on and I found the melodrama stilted and embarrassing. But this time around, I thought, *Why the hell not? Do you want to go your whole life without making a bold and tender claim? No, I don't! So make it, I shall!* Growing up no-collar (welfare and drug dealing), a poet was a joke and a sin and, worse, a sissy. It was okay for me to turn into a writer, as I was a gross and sexual, short-worded writer. Well, I'm going to stop being afraid of poetry. Let's just face that it's marvelous. To be delicate is the boldest thing a gritty person could do.

I try to not love Tyler Perry so much, but I do, I do.

Cosmopolis

Each piece of dialogue and symbolism of the visuals is pungent; there is no rest in between in which to process it. All these microcosms of relationships or at least intersections: between lovers, between workers, between time and theory and technology. Each 120 seconds would be a 120-minute movie with anyone else writing and directing. It's too much. I like too much. (I also like too little. Just don't try to feed me any just right!)

One guy: "Any special reason we're in the car [stretch limo] instead of the office?"

Other guy: "What makes you think we're in the car instead of the office?"

They're proposing money is an illusion. They're proposing money is all kinds of things, and that all kinds of things are illusion. I think I believe nothing is an illusion. It's all real.

It was right to have a beautiful, vacant man (Robert Pattison, *Twilight* tween throb) play the lead. The character's brilliance was in his arrogance, his coldness, his ability to play with people because he doesn't care at all. Wooden acting was effective here. Interspersed with sudden, fleeting injections of knowing what it *would* feel like to feel something. Crying

over the religious singer who moves him, hugging that big guy like a baby, showed his idealism of everything he is not and could never be. And that's why he wanted to die. He disappointed himself.

Not a Movie, Just What My Blind Date Told Me

A man and a woman got divorced. She took one shih tzu, he took the other. When one divorcee traveled, he or she left their shih tzu with the other divorcee and shih tzu sister. One time the man arrived to pick up his shih tzu driving a Mercedes SL. The woman was on the phone with a friend and she “made a snide remark” about him being able to afford the car when she couldn’t. He said, “You keep the dog. It’s worth it to me to give her up in order to never see you again and hear your snide comments.”

I heard this at the beginning, when I still conscripted to at least three more hours. I believe it was meant to illustrate that this was a man who believed in (his) freedom and happiness. A hero, really. But I don’t know what picking a car over a dog has to do with freedom. When it comes to a dog, you just eat the snide comments. You take them blankly as statements, or even compliments. Like, “Yeah, I can afford a \$100K+ convertible and you can’t, thank you!”

On this night, my date was driving a BMW, which I think is the most hideous car ever, and is owned by dullards who are totally into climate control. I try not to judge, but I do, I do.

Fifty Shades of Grey

I think *Fifty Shades* was a great movie for trying to figure out how to do a relationship. Because the characters negotiated what the relationship *was*. Most people assume it's one thing and they think you're crazy or gross if you think or want anything different. That goes for kinky people, too. Women who talk about the movie or book always seem to bring up that they are or once were in the lifestyle, so they possess the authority to deem this depiction unrealistic, a fantasy for housewives. You're just hoping to distinguish yourselves from, you know, the regular women, ya snobs!

Men who read a review (I don't think any men actually saw the movie) declare that its message was that it's okay to be a "douchebag" to women as long as you have a "buttload" of cash. Every time I hear that argument, I hear that they're jealous that they don't have enough money yet to treat women like shit. I also think it is inferred that there comes a point in business success where you're no longer human. But I think Christian Grey used his money as a language to express and couch emotions and avoid putting them out there undiluted or even acknowledge them to himself, like some poor people do with music.

I don't think the bosses of the world are that happy. It seems to me royalty are more imprisoned in their role than

are serfs, because more eyes are on them. *Fifty Shades* was about a boss and a not-boss, trapped in their respective positions in the power structure, trying to find a way to reach each other. Reviewers and bloggers claim the movie objectifies women and he's a stalker. I don't think it's stalking when two defective people feel vulnerable and attempt to control, or at least to make predictable, what happens next by always knowing and dictating where the other is and who s/he is with. He, by drawing up contracts and buying and arranging things; she, by referencing the general consensus about order and timeframes for romantic relationship steps as if that holds ultimate authority. In fact, he respected her limits once she'd say what one was, and she did not respect his. (He said, Don't touch me, don't probe, and that's all she did! Touch and probe!) And I'm not sure what this signifies, but man oh man, never have I seen a movie where a guy was *so* into going down on a lady and fingering her and doing etcetera to her, and not once did he ask for a blowjob and she never brought it up either.

Falling in love, you experience the illusion that this person is giving you life; ergo, if they take it back, they will kill you. An intense romance really can feel like murder is lurking around every corner. And at the same time you want to flee your murderer, even more so you want to crawl all up inside them. You freak out. That's all that happened here.

The Night Porter, which deals with many of these same themes, is a great movie and *Fifty Shades* is not. But sometimes I don't need a *great* movie, I just need something that's striving to speak about right now. *The Night Porter* was made in the '70s; that gave them 30 years to digest the

myriad Nazi abuses of power and find the right storyline to showcase them in a personal relationship. Capitalism today doesn't look so dramatic, but it may be that we're too inside it to see what it is, or the destruction is simply sneakier, less grand. Not everything has to be the worst ever in order to be bad enough to examine.

Magic Mike XXL

The goal of every character—male and female—in *Magic Mike XXL* is to listen to women, make women smile, sing to them, worship them, and satisfy them, and it worked on this woman. The message of *MMXXL* is that sexuality is good, sex is good, and the body is good. That may seem trite, but when you really think about it, what's better? Fighting for political freedom? If warmongers believed in the goodness and importance of the body, they wouldn't want to blow any bodies to bits anymore, so really I think this message trumps all of them. Also, we get to witness Twitch and Channing Tatum mirror each other in an, oh god, beautiful dance. I want to go back!

A former Disney actor joined the troupe. That was disconcerting at first, but then I realized all kids grow up and want to make sweet love, and that's okay. Also, his big thing was asking women about themselves and then turning it into a song. A hump song. But one that elevated them. A healing hump.

I was further disconcerted because Channing Tatum is looking more and more like my cat Orange, especially around the eyes, and I was thinking, Do I want to have sex with my cat?

The big difference between *Fifty Shades of Grey* and *MMXXL* is the Grey guy tries to quit you and he can't. Magic Mike would never quit you. But if you told him to go away, he'd go. Like a hangdog. And you'd say, "Oh, come back, Magic Mike. I could never stay mad at you!"

Big Ang

Lil Jen: Look at all these furs. You have a zoo! You need to have a yard sale.

Big Ang: Yard sale? I need to commit suicide.
(Creative solutions by Big Ang.)

René Magritte

That nasty man had something slyly dreadful to say on every artist, every subject. He was a bitchy hope-killer, and he makes me laugh. He even disdains anyone who likes his own work: “When one sees one of my pictures, one asks oneself this simple question ‘What does that mean?’ It does not mean anything, because mystery means nothing either, it is unknowable.”

First of all, how do you know what I was saying in my mind, Nasty? Secondly, how do you know your pictures are mystery? Bragger! I love you.

Would you tell me some things you detest, please? “My past, and anyone else’s. I detest resignation, patience, [...] and obligatory beautiful feelings. I also detest [...] folklore, [...] boy scouts [...].”

So you don’t really like the past. How do you feel about the present? “The present reeks.”

Boondock Saints

Totally for the homos. I never saw so many shower scenes for no reason and the butts out. In the barn it rained indoors on men like *Flashdance*.

Rush Limbaugh

Rush Limbaugh is so convincing with his slow-spoken sentences of few words with no “um”s or “like”s but many heavy pauses and deep sniffs. He’s so satisfied with his utterances. Limbaugh talks like he perpetually just finished some supremely tasty fried food and he’s tonguing the leftover bits in his mouth with pleasure and leisure. (Hitler, by comparison, spoke like he was in a race with a heart attack.) I’m going to try talking like that. Maybe it would help if I was on OxyContin and slowly squashing three wives.

Sarah Orne Jewett

Sarah Orne Jewett planted lilacs everywhere on her estate in South Berwick, Maine, and would cut off great bunches of them and take them on the train to Boston where she'd meet up with Emerson and Longfellow and Henry James and discuss all kinds of topics. She would leave the lilacs with them and make the long travel home, and when she smelled the lilac bushes at her front door, all the things they'd talked about would come rushing back to her, and she would scurry in to write them all down by hand in the sitting room. She loved the smell of things. What an *author*.

The Yellow Wallpaper

A housebound lady with an indeterminate (nonexistent?) illness has a husband who refuses to let her change the wallpaper even though it's been partially peeled (by locked-up trouble boys of yore?) and she sees in the squiggles bulging eyes and nooses. Husband just goes to work and leaves her there with the peeling paper of bulging eyes and nooses.

What follows has been interpreted by reviewers as an “obvious descent into psychosis.” I don't know about that. It could have been a very sane response to insane conditions. I'm tired of that getting called mental illness or overreaction or self-destruction. Let me trap and torture *you*, Determiner Of What Is Obvious, and I will call it love and call it the way things are. Let's see how you handle that, and I will decide what your response to me says about you.

Flying Monkeys

It's this cute little pet monkey (Skippy) in the day, but by night it turns into a gargoyle-looking thing that has already killed all the other animals on the plane, the copilot, all the animals in the pet shop—"tore them apart like the devil himself got a taste for pooch and pork"—and now the little guy is about to do in a mercenary.

Oh my god, teens having sex and now evil monkey killed the boy and is chasing the girl.... Oh my god, he got her!

Meanwhile, back in China, beautiful monks are asking the poachers, "Are your men being mysteriously ripped to shreds?" It seems there are only two of these evil monkeys left, and if they bring the one in China to America and it finds Skippy, they will breed and make a nation of weremonkeys.

The girl who received as a gift the weremonkey in his cute day form just said, "Dad.... Skippy.... He grew wings and.... Dad, he killed Ol' Man Sykes! And *ate* him!"

The weremonkey called for a pizza delivery boy. He's becoming Americanized.

He ate the pizza delivery boy. Isn't a weremonkey *ever* full?

On-the-ball detective: "They ate the pizza kid. Swarmed him, attacked him, and ate him. Pizza's still warm."

When a weremonkey is shot, except for by the monk's blessed weapons, they duplicate. The Eastern mystic voice of reason: "What's with these fools and their guns? Ancient demons require ancient weapons."

More random dialogue that could enhance many occasions in my life, accompanied by an organ in the corner thundering and a fan blowing my hair, along with literal flashbacks in my living room: "Unwrap the gift that keeps on destroying." "This snow globe.... There's something strange about it."

How Skippy was finally done in: just like King Kong. He went willingly upstairs straight into the trap they'd set up in the girl's bedroom. He went to die inside the dream of a love once found, forever lost. The next day, I was still thinking about that final look of resigned betrayal in his weremonkey eyes, and the townsman's commentary: "No more monkey business."

The Iliad of Sandy Bar

Two miners had a dispute over a claim and became enemies, but they wouldn't just have a duel like other men and resolve the problem; they also refused to get drunk and forget about it. They stayed angry and tried to mess things up for each other in various ways and wouldn't speak until eventually one of them was almost dead and the other held his hand and he died.

Death really brings out the best in some people. If only we could die all the time.

Wake Me Up Before You Go-Go

I *just now* figured out what this song means. His boyfriend is doing it solo next to him in the bed in the night, and he wants him to wake him up before he blows his gasket. So then they can synchronize it, and he (the one singing) won't have to wake up later and masturbate all alone while the other one sleeps through it. Right?

Too Late to Say Goodbye

Killer dentist: “No, you don’t break up with me, I break up with you.”

Girl, who is in dental school: “You have some serious issues.”

Killer Dentist: “And you’ll never be a dentist.”

Hapless Patient: “Who do I gotta kill around here to get an oral exam?”

I caught this amazing dialogue from the TV on in the other room, so of course I had to interrupt my work to investigate. It’s Rob Lowe! He’s the killer dentist! This is the Lifetime channel, where all the ladies are just a little too old and their boobs are *enormous*. How thrilling would it be to be on staff locked in a room with five other people having to churn this dialogue out in (in my mind) 24 Mountain Dew-fueled hours, each hour climbing in insanity.

Killer Dentist’s Brother: “Look, you’re my brother. If you tell me you’re innocent, I’ll believe you.”

Killer Dentist: [just looks at him and smiles]

Girl, to study partner: “Smell my contact lens. Does that smell like anything to you?”

Study Partner: [sniffs] “It smells like hairspray.”

Killer Dentist: “Don’t play games with me, Detective, you won’t win. You’re not good enough.”

(You have to add in the low flute sounds when something particularly ominous is said. Which is, like, everything said.)

Detective, *to an Alabamian*: “Our D.A.s over in Georgia are *real good*, and they’re going to catch you in perjury.... That’s lying.”

(Now that everything is starting to boil over, they’ve added some wind chimes.)

Lady Detective: “I smell a warrant!”

(There’s a lot of smelling going on in this movie.)

My god, the sister of the latest victim is going to *bust her shirt*. How can the actors all keep their eyes on each other’s eyes??

Lady Detective: “You’re goin’ down, Doc.”

Oh! It’s a true story! It’s Bart Corbin. And that Lady Detective was right, the Doc did go down. Bart Corbin isn’t due for parole till 2034.

I Never Did Find Out the Title for This Movie

Satan said, “Wouldn’t you like to see what’s on Lifetime this evening? You could always turn it off right after.”

Oh god, what’s on is Tom Arnold playing the big city conglomerate businessman at the small town-hall meeting. He wants to ruin Christmas by turning the town into a mall and calling it progress.

Patrick Dempsey is the small-town boy gone city slicker (lawyer) coming back to do Tom Arnold’s dirty work, and there’s a feisty and frumpy (she’ll get the makeover at the end) liberal who knows all the old folk fighting Tom and Patrick.

Oh god, there’s the dad from *Wizards of Waverly Place*!

Oh no, Patrick Dempsey just showed his mother the engagement ring he’s planning to give the bitch with the straight hair and the unballad solid-colored sweaters.

The villain woman’s name is Reagan.

Uh oh. Patrick Dempsey and tousled-hair liberal lady, through twists of fate, have been thrown together in a polka. You know what that means.

The dad from *Wizards of Waverly Place*, who is in real life Dom DeLuise’s son, called the polka dance floor a mosh pit. They’re in a barn. Once you enter a barn, there’s nothing to do but exit it with destiny realizing itself.

The Christmas Consultant

How's your Saturday night? I'm spending mine on the Hallmark Channel, bawling my eyes out.

Currently, The Hof (formerly of *Baywatch*) wears a bow tie and neon-colored glasses, sports a drifting European accent, a giggle, and has such a tight facelift he looks both seventy years old and seven.

Plus, an orange hairpiece.

I'm never having sex again.

Highwater pants.

I am mesmerized.

The Hof just shattered an outdoor Christmas ornament with the power of his caroling, and it fell down and set off a car alarm. Every time he talks about his family and how he spends Christmas day with them, his face falls as much as the facelift allows. I suspect they are in a graveyard.

OH MY GOD IT'S TRUE, THEY'RE ALL DEAD!

Repulsion

Desire really is horrible, cumulatively. What was it like for Carol to be wolf-called, courted without restraint, given special treatment, given the once-over all-over all day long, from childhood on? Whether a man was trying to rape her or save her, he displayed the very same bulldozing of her tiny signs of no. The universal desire for the beautiful sick girl, shown for once from the target's perspective, without bothering with the desirers' professed intentions or explanations. How odd that a child-rapist (Roman Polanski) demonstrated the keenest empathy for the victim of this Chinese water torture that I've ever seen represented on the screen.

Henry Rollins

I saw Henry Rollins speak a bunch of years ago. I rarely remember anything anyone says, including what I say. But I was really struck by him saying he went to every place the U.S. government said was unsafe and everyone welcomed him as a brother and said thank you for coming to our home, and the food was tasty and there was music and the only danger he ever got was from Customs upon his return.

I saw him in his shorts and sweats years ago, too. Short shorts. Silky. This was in the '80s in Boston at, I think, The Rat. A whole lotta masculine energy in that room. It reeked!

When Henry Rollins left Black Flag and went solo, people say his music went to hell. I was going to contradict them, but then I re-listened to “Hot Animal Machine.” I planned to defend him musically because I remember walking around alone in the dark outside in my youth singing this song in my mind feeling like I was the hot animal machine, feeling fearsome. But then I listened to it now just sitting on my couch, and it *is* awful. Still, the feeling surged. (“Stalking” around in the night, I should’ve said, instead of “walking.” Ready for anything.)

I hear good things about him as a person, like that he always goes to shows and record stores and never asks to

be comped. He's not too big for his britches. His tiny, tiny britches.

I also heard this. Someone who had sex with him a long time ago said that, at the magic moment, he yelled, "ARE YOU READY TO RECEIVE THE SEED OF ROLLINS?" I don't know if this was a joke or deadly serious. I don't know which I want it to be. I couldn't stop picturing it all day. If you were a fan and that happened to you, would you feel horrified or glorified? I mean... We don't want our heroes to be humble and human, I think, right? We would like for them to bellow in the act.

A Limber Riddle

What am I?

No one likes me.

I'm not even defined. I have been described as "just about anything, really."

I might look like overnight-camp cheerleaders sniffing their own underarms in the air mid-leap from bed to bed. Or a lone arachnid about to pounce on a shadow.

I lied. Someone loves me. It's Lisa, who attended me once when I was in the form of some muscular gents tossing and piercing silver Mylar pillows accompanied by a score of smashed piano by John Cage. A second act involved a dancer at the front of the stage doing something pretty while the dancers in the back imitated her badly, making fun of her.

Sam Kinison

My favorite comedians aren't funny. Sam Kinison is a greasy, sweaty failure just yelling his lines out, just hurtling them, standing up there and not leaving. I'm not laughing at *or* with him. These surprised/exasperated barks coming out of me are a reaction to the...hmm...nobility. The nobility of still proceeding when all signs say don't.

I heard that in his last interview, right before he died, he expressed regretting it all. You can see that in every single act: the coming regret.

I Have No Idea What These Trash Festivals Named Themselves

When I was little, I'd find those steamy books my mother and the other mothers read with raised flowers on the cover, and in one the guy ripped the woman's diaphragm out and threw it across the room before having his way with her. I thought it was her body part diaphragm he reached in and plucked out and tossed. I thought that was so passionate.

This was 1970s masturbation material for repressed older women who wanted to be part of the sexual revolution and didn't know how to get there. These books presented brutal rape as one possible way. And for ten-year-old me, Protestant, supposed to not want sex—if some guy came in and ripped out my organ and then had at me, I would get to have sex without committing the sin of desire.

Other scenes I remember from those freaky housewife books: A man was in love with a woman but she wouldn't do anything sexual with him. He took her from behind in her living room without permission to “try to show how much he loved her,” and when he finally turned her around and went to kiss her, she was weeping. She had no pubic hair or breasts, and she was bleeding. Her body never matured.

Also, there was an orgy and a dog was in it. This was not porn. They sold these books at the grocery store.

The Stand

I have a really strong memory (though it may not be true, because I googled it and found nothing) of a woman having sex with the devil, who wore jeans, in one of Stephen King's books, and her hair turned white. I mingled this with some other things I read and heard in songs as a girl that informed me about what sex was or could be, and I really wanted something that would turn my hair white overnight, even if it ruined me. It seemed worth it. I still want it.

International Noise Conference

The night began with experimental film, jarringly. (Why is it so rare to experiment with something *pleasant*?)

An older lady and very old man did a great set. The man's shoes were off and he was curled around his pedal or whatever it was, twisting it so hard I think he was sweating. The lady was playing—stabbing—an iPhone, iPad, laptop, keyboards, and she sang in a language I couldn't recognize. Maybe it was “in tongues.” It was good to see an older female channeling rage. When you're young and cute, it's sanctioned for a girl to be yelling, because enough men will extrapolate that you're drunk, unstable, and good in bed. The older women get, the more they're discouraged from and ridiculed for even feeling mad silently (which gets relabeled “bitter”)—never mind building your whole sound around it.

Cave Bears did really awful comedy. Worse than awful. (My favorite kind.)

This was one of those 12-hour shows in someone's house in Boston that the cops are always trying to bust by posing as dudes on Facebook asking, where's the party? It was dangerous and unregulated. An infamous hassler named Nathan was hassling me, and when my new best

friend Conner got between us, Nathan smashed his can on Conner's head and beer bounced into my eyeball. My friend Ian cut his finger on a broken bottle and I saw his bone. His metacarpal. His finger flesh was flapping and blood was *pouring* out, on the basement steps, upstairs, in every room, all over the bathroom. Everyone made fun of him for going to the hospital. I guess it doesn't sound like a good idea to go to this kind of show, when I write it down.

They didn't charge at the door, but there was a collection bucket. Well, Shane from Two Dead Sluts, One Good Fuck reached in and started throwing dollars around, going: "Free money!" I mean, you just don't do that. That's like mooning a blind person. Shane does what people just don't do. That guy is a walking scandal.

We were all packed in the basement very tight and a member of Egg, Eggs bound us all together with VHS tape. Very sexy. David Ewing wore onesie long johns and he unbuttoned them and I believe I saw him take his penis out and then my view was obstructed. Arabic music, grown men dancing like children, throwing their arms up over their heads and bouncing. Whooping.

"I'm an audience member, could you play something good instead of something bad? Because there is a difference," said an audience member who wanted to say something.

Rat Bastard invited two other ladies and me to play transistor radios while he played his set. We were just twisting the knobs and holding microphones up to the speakers. At some invisible cue, things went crazy. A man smashed the hanging light bulb with his fist. Other people

started smashing stools and each other in the dark and it felt like a roller coaster. When the hurricane is here, your worries and fears about what *might* happen disappear. It's happening.

The Beach Boys

When I feel lonely, they make me hopeful. Like that I will be loved again someday, or I'm loved right now, by the ocean, the sky, the sounds. Their later stuff sounds like that to me. Their early stuff sounds just purely physical to me, it sounds like being young, it sounds like fun. That's good too, but their later stuff, it makes my heart feel like it doesn't weigh anything and it's rising.

Don't you have a pain deep inside that needs caressing and can only be reached by a certain constellation of notes? A constellation of notes that is simultaneously surprising and...fated? You can't predict the next note before it falls, but as soon as it comes, you know it could be only that.

Coming Up For Air

Orwell is revered for his dystopias. But life really is just a topia, and so is this oddly gentle, gently mournful little book about an unremarkable, overweight, underloved insurance salesman playing hooky to go fishing, a thing his wife says he's too old for and his boss says he has no time for. Plenty of people don't have big dreams. But everyone has a little dream, and you have to be even more dogged (and sneaky and lying in this fellow's case) pursuing the little dream, because it looks so brush-awayable, sacrificeable. It looks little. But any dream is everything. If the people depending on you won't release you for two days, they're killing you. It's them or you.

Charmingly, Orwell didn't posit our hero's quest the way I just did at all. He told only the mechanics of the escape, and of the fishing. He never once even implied that our hero was a hero. But he was.

Guess Who?

I used to never consume news, and this philosophy king swooped past without me hearing anything about it at the time.

“The absence of evidence is not evidence of absence, or vice versa.”

“And it is not knowable if force will be used, but if it is to be used, it is not knowable how long....”

“Freedom’s untidy, and free people are free to make mistakes and commit crimes and do bad things.”

“I’m not into this detail stuff. I’m more concepty.”

“You go to war with the army you have, not the army you might want or wish to have at a later time.”

And finally (this is the known one):

The message is that there are no ‘knowns.’ There are things we know that we know. There are known unknowns. That is to say there are things that we now know we don’t know. But there are also unknown unknowns. There are things we do not know we don’t know.

Detroit

We were at Destroy Compound in Detroit. Maddie Kuzak makes noise music that is very warm—that's so unusual. It made me think of how David Bowie described his first hearing of Donna Summer: "Those cold Teutonic beats! That animalistic sexuality!" There was no table. Maddie had her equipment spread out on a blanket like a picnic. She had her butt up in the air, bending over buttons she was punching while rubbing a contact mic against her throat while she moaned and ooh'ed and howled and laughed. Usually noise musicians try to drain all the human-ness out of themselves, like a cross between the most civilized man and an alien, but Maddie was like a native. Like extra-human: You can imagine her eating and having a baby and getting old and going swimming, stuff like that.

I went on after her. I was in my conceptual art phase, so my show was no show. I sat there on a chair on the stage and waited for something to happen. A very enthusiastic, sweaty man named Matthew had asked to introduce my show the night before, and his introduction was monumental—something about me being a cross between Buddha and Manson, and after reading my book he took his underwear off and followed a stranger home and his life changed. At the end, he collapsed with catharsis and some girls tried to beat him up but they only took his glasses off and his sneakers.

Maddie felt that tonight we needed an introduction to his introduction. She said something like, “This is Matthew, he had cancer, he had a divorce, and he is a very passionate introducer. Tonight, he’s brought his roommate—” and then she said some stuff about the roommate, who was wearing an Adidas tracksuit, Adidas socks, Adidas shoes, and an Adidas cap. Then Matthew gave an even more magnificent intro than he had before, and by now the anticipation was really built up.

I looked out at everyone’s waiting and I waited. I wouldn’t care if they did nothing. In fact, a lot of people did do nothing the night before. One of them, when we went out to eat after, said he felt really bad about doing nothing, he said he was standing there thinking, *I could do anything. I should do something.* And he kept on doing nothing. He said he was thinking about what that meant about himself. I was really happy about that. I bet next time he’s in a situation where something really should happen, he’ll be the one to do it.

Lots of stuff happened the second night, though. Broken glass everywhere, a garbage can got put over the head of a tall man I’d gotten a crush on earlier. (I couldn’t tell if he was lying to me or joking, or maybe lying is his sense of humor; I find that appealing.) People were throwing stuff, throwing more stuff. Someone threw a table. Some people tried to leave and some people wouldn’t let them. A guy said he had a gun and he would shoot Maddie, and he called her a feminist. There was a mime there who had stayed in mime form all night, and she busted out laughing at the violence

(I always do, too). It was contagious, and the whole room became hysterical. It was a really long time since I'd laughed so hard.

I should mention that on my flight to Detroit, there were four wigs, including a Rod Stewart one, and one on backwards. I sat next to a black lady in head-to-toe leopard except for her green boots and purple nails—she was on her way to a funeral.

Criminal Justice

One detective says to the other that the perp couldn't "get off" unless torturing and watching the effects. How do they know? How would they know someone couldn't have an orgasm any other way? Ever? They're so smug.

I Have No Idea What This Was, But I'd Watch It Again For Sure

This teenager in a reenactment burst into her mom's house in the middle of the night and said, "I saw a werewolf!" And her mom said her first thought was, *What if it followed her home? What if there's more than one of them?*

(If you're wondering what the werewolf was doing, it was eating roadkill.)

Are you cynically chuckling because obviously her daughter was just out late doing drugs and sex things and her mother was a rube to buy the werewolf story? I chuckled too, until I learned about the wendigo and got off my high horse.

The wendigo is between 8 and 15 feet high, and it can show up anytime, anywhere, in anyone. In 1879 in Canada, Swift Runner was the only survivor of his entire family. He claimed they all starved to death over the winter. Suspiciously, Swift Runner still weighed over 200 pounds. The wendigo had possessed him, and he not only ate his family, he broke their bones open to suck out the marrow.

In 1997, three scientists entered a forest. Only one came out.

In 2008, a wendigo got on a bus and stabbed a passenger and ate him right in front of everyone.

It seems obvious that the myth of the wendigo came about to explain or excuse cannibalism. But everything is a way to explain everything. The wendigo could be a political or corporation model or addiction or some kinky relationship. The more the wendigo eats, the more ravenous he or she gets, sometimes going so far as to chew their own lips off.

Judy Garland

It's her voice, her face, her life, her emotion, what happened to her, her yearning. But mostly her voice. Just the sound of it, just one note, and I'm like sick in my stomach with tears and I want something out there. It's someone far away telling me about something I'll never reach, and I'd forgotten about it, but I remember again every time.

Drumline

I was agitated. To calm down, I started watching a movie about a marching band. But then they had a drum-off and a member of one team broke rank and walked right up to the other team and started playing *their* drums and one guy knocked him down with a drum to the head, and that started a riot.

Oh my god. So the guy who played the other team's drum (he's the innovator) (it's Nick Cannon) got kicked out of school, but he went back to the rehearsal space at night one last time to record some stuff, and the number one traditionalist with whom he's always butted heads was there, and they almost started fighting, but instead they had a personal drum-off in the night, drumming right up into each others faces, calling each other names. Then they started playing each other's sticks in the six or so inches between their sweaty faces. So erotic.

Nick Cannon can't read sheet music. A city slicker tries to steal him away from his tough coach who demands a strong base of knowledge and comes off as restricting him. The city slicker says he'll let him do whatever showman-like thing he wants, and he doesn't have to learn to read sheet music, either. He just wants to exploit Nick Cannon for a moment

instead of enrich Nick Cannon for a lifetime, like the coach wants to. Beware Shortcut Sally, only passing through!

Nick Cannon shows this white teammate how to “make love” to his big drum in a tiny room. Some girls pass by in the hallway and overhear them and misunderstand. This movie has it all!

In a competition, a lady drummer spins her cymbals crazily, hypnotizing the judges (and me).

Hoarders

Three sisters are sorting through a disabled brother's bedroom. He'd asked that they not go there and let the professionals do it instead, but the show insisted on sending the sisters with the film crew. They find first pornography and then an "even more disturbing discovery:" women's garters and a wig. The sisters are in tears. One is saying, "What the hell? What the hell? Who *does* that?" They're throwing all his stuff in the trash. Then they find dildos and a giridle that they call "S&M wear" and the one sister starts screaming and screaming. She's gonna need a whole bottle of Valium.

Who does *that*? Who insists on going in their disabled brother's bedroom after he asks her not to and then complains about what she finds in there? I can't believe I'm watching this.

The sister is saying, "How dare you? How *dare you*!?" Pointing her finger at him and aiming her hate-face at him.

It's so distressing. I'm gulping. I bet those sisters have thought of incest while masturbating. I mean, who hasn't? But some people can't handle it and end up group-raping their family member's privacy on camera.

I want to set up a camera in that screaming sister's bedroom and then air whatever I find. If there *is* anything to find. Probably there's nothing. That pathetic, inhibited lady is so jealous of her sexy bro!

Too often disabled people are seen as having all the rights of a child, which is pretty much none. (He's about 50.) I don't understand how anyone can be anything other than happy that someone does what they want with their sexuality. Especially when they're seen by society as non-sexual. He is incontinent, too, and he doesn't let that get in the way of getting all exotic. He's my hero! I want to go visit him and take him out on the town in his wheelchair and his get-up.

The brother is now apologizing and saying to his sisters that what he "did" was "inexcusable." I think this is the worst moment out of so many terrible moments. I want to burn something.

The show coerced him into letting those sisters in his bedroom, making threats about the house being condemned if he didn't. What the producers did for ratings is evil, but they wouldn't have had anything to play off if the sisters, and society in general, were cool and respectful and truly wanted to help a guy in a wheelchair needing oxygen and having difficulty cleaning up after himself. But—and I don't know if the sisters will ever get this—the pervert exposed to millions of viewers was not him. They think what their brother puts up his butt or with what silky drawers he swathes his penis is something for them to hold up to the camera and scream about. That's his sexuality, but their sickness.

Black Sea

All these guys in a submarine keep on saying “shit” all the time. Then Jude Law says, “Well, this shit is fighting back!” (Jude Law is the shit that’s fighting back.)

The Andy Griffith Show

They're trying to replace Aunt Bea's terrible homemade pickles with store-bought ones so that her feelings won't be hurt when she makes them eat them in front of her. She's so proud of her pickles. Barney said, "I can't face the future if eight quarts of those pickles are in it!"

So they replaced her pickles, and the store-bought pickles were so good, Aunt Bea decided to enter them in the state fair. Then a widow came into the sheriff's station with *her* pickles and she described how her dead husband loved her pickles and he'd always say when he got to heaven, he reckoned there wouldn't be any better pickles there. Then she said she's won the pickle contest for 11 years, and when she's lonesome, she takes out her ribbons and looks at them and she feels peace that there's *something* in life she's best at. Andy realizes he can't let her pickles potentially get beat out by store-bought pickles, so he and Barney have to eat *all eight quarts* of Aunt Bea's pickles (now store-bought, but still!) in the couple of days before the fair so that she'll have to make another awful batch to enter.

The Air-Conditioned Nightmare

I'm listening to Henry Miller go on and on about how much America sucks and the only thing that's good are a few men he mentions, and the only thing he's said so far about women in this whole book is that professors' wives are *so boring*. He's going on and on about pacifism and war and the nature of men—in what was supposed to be a *travel book*, not everything he thinks in the world!—and I think maybe *he's* so boring.

Now he's delineating the two men he comes from (his paternal and maternal grandfathers,) as if the women ancestors...took no part? It's like we're not even sentient. We're wombs/ovens/vaginas; we're all these functioning holes with like no eyes, no feet for roaming, no longings....

I get the feeling he spent the advance, and he had to turn *something* in, and this was it.

I really responded to the exhortation to be free and not care about money or approval, in the books of his I read in my youth. And his enthusiasm for art and experience. I don't know how much of that was just my age and my willingness to see all that in anything I came across.

We are told to overlook the accidental misogyny because male writers of that era just didn't get women. But take, say, Richard Wright: He at least knew that he didn't know,

and had a yearning to know (though almost no actual knowing). Henry Miller didn't merely not ponder women—he pondered men like Chinese water torture on my head, repeating the word “man” and “men” on every page when discussing any ideas or achievements or battles. So wearing.

Perhaps Wright's being black gave him an advantage, literature-wise—he knew what it was to be made invisible and/or ridiculous, so he had a grasp or at least a guess of what other people (i.e., women) might feel. Whereas with Miller or many of my other favorite white male writers, it's hard for them to know what they never knew. *The Nick Adams Stories* is a collection from various sources of Hemingway's rather autobiographical writings as Nick Adams. Black men are all written as obsequious, with no nod given to this always being a white narrator interacting with or observing them, and his presence will change what they show of their personalities. He displayed the same lack of imagination or acknowledgment with women, too. His very presence among us required a covering up or disguising of the majority of our real lives, our real selves.

I wish I could say my favorite author was a woman, my favorite painter, my favorite philosopher. I adore Julia Kristeva, but I read her as if it is me talking to myself, if only I were smarter and more lovely in mind. I feel like I need more distance from a favorite. Only then can I be possessed by the compulsion to get nearer that keeps you feeling almost there eternally. I think my inability to feel passionate about the harmonious springs from being heterosexual in a culture brimming with unhealthy man-woman dynamics. Nietzsche is my favorite philosopher, but how do

you think it feels, you men-readers (the rest of you don't have to wonder), to always hear your favorites with whom you identify speaking of your kind like this: "The true man wants two things: danger and play. For that reason he wants woman, as the most dangerous plaything." I mean, I'm a true man. I'm such a true man, I don't think of any human being as a plaything. How *dangerous* can a not real human being be?

I think the real danger for Nietzsche was the tension between how he needed to feel about women's identity and the evidence of how they really were. He wanted so badly to tell the truth, but his need to not be embarrassed proved bigger in the woman case. I'm trying to think of who sinned the worst out of those three men. Miller was immature and Nietzsche was mentally ill, so I vote for Hemingway, even though out of the three he got the closest to allowing women to be human in his books, largely because of his massive propensity for dialogue. It's harder to fuck a woman over when you, merely by a fluke of style, let her speak for herself.

A New England Nun

A lady set tea and then this big guy came to visit and he knocked stuff over and left. Well, first he put some books back in the wrong order, *then* he knocked stuff over.

She uses the good china all the time instead of locking it away in the good cupboard, which scandalizes her neighbors. She also grows “perfect” lettuce, and she then cuts individual leaves with a fork and a knife. Along with the aforementioned particular arranging of the books...I can’t even believe this woman would let that man in her house ever! Nothing good can come of it. The author set her up. Tension, conflict, all for the sake of resolution. The character never asked for any of it.

The big galumph who came a-visiting was the careful lady’s betrothed. They’d gotten engaged 15 years earlier; he went to Australia to make his fortune “quickly” and come back to her. Now he was back, and it was one week to the wedding. In the 15 years he was finding his fortune, living large, our lady lived small. But every part of her small world was self-made. She drew much satisfaction from her neatly repaired, delicate pieces of clothing folded without wrinkle, each in their drawer in her dresser. She was disturbed by “nearly violent visions” of tossed-about masculine articles of

clothing caked in mud, dust rising and choking the air, then settling in the carpets.

There's something else I have to tell you, and I don't know how. The dog. He was chained up in a hut outside. Fourteen years earlier, as a puppy, he bit a neighbor and the neighbor said kill him or lock him away. So she and her brother locked him away in his little hut on a short chain and he spent his days in there. The lady made him little corn cakes to eat. She feared bones and meat would awaken his blood lust and he would tear off his chain and rampage through the neighborhood, bloodied children wailing in his wake. Well, the betrothed said he was the finest dog in the neighborhood, and threatened to take him on walks, and even let him run free. Only the lady's most urgent supplications held the man back. Once they were married, she didn't know if even that would stop him in his desire to let the dog out of his hut. She pictured the villagers tracking the dog and pitchforking him to death, as a mob.

Whoever or whatever the dog symbolizes, the dog is also the dog.

I won't tell you about the end, because it wraps everything up, and that's not how life is. I'm still thinking about the dog, and I won't take part in using its existence as cog in the wheel of story arc.

Mary MacLane

She grew up a tomboy in Butte, Montana. In 1901, at 19, she wrote *The Story of Mary MacLane*, a brave, solipsistic portrayal of her fiery soul roaming flat, barren Butte and calling the devil. Shocked the critics in her hometown and elsewhere. Got royalties, moved to Chicago, visited New York and Boston. Wrote *My Friend Annabel Lee* in 1903. A disappointment—nothing radical enough in it to make the critics hoot. She moved back to Butte in 1910 and wrote a depressed and tiny third book: *I, Mary MacLane*. In 1917, she wrote and starred in the witty, smoky movie *Men Who Have Made Love to Me*.

A year later, Mary MacLane disappeared from her Chicago hotel room. Reappeared in 1919 and was arrested for having stolen the gowns she wore in the movie. She then lived beyond her means, gambled, wrote no more, became impoverished, ill, disillusioned, friendless, and finally, in 1929, died; the puny splash she made in her life leaving few ripples.

Like Rod Stewart's big-bosomed lady with a Dutch accent, Mary MacLane is a little shocking, a little bewitching, employs a clever turn of phrase—and lacks heart and soul. Maybe. Has little to say except “I am like this” and “I am like that.” To young me, still able to find myself like this or

like that or the other, and who read anyone's "I" as secretly meaning *me*, that was plenty to say.

She liberates the day. Everyday acts are exceptional and exquisite when Mary MacLane is around. Buying licorice is an "interesting errand." Friendship has a taste—that of "a cigarette or an olive." A robin makes "bubbling notes" in a "mint meadow."

Like most women behaving out of order, she has been called a liar, a genius, a lesbian, honest, intellectually limited, and hetero. But that's just because she considered most traits mere tools to be picked up or discarded at will, and what she strove always to expose with surety and clarity was her unique "bloody self just beneath the skin."

Bloody Wounds

Bloody Wounds is an unconventional person who makes unconventional music, so unbound by genre (or tempo... or...) that with no clue as to how to interpret this odd find, you end up finding yourself. I hear a helpless, distorted-thinking, ambitious little person up against a vicious town with nothing but songs on the radio for a shield, because that's who I was as a kid. The photographer I took with me when I interviewed her in her apartment in York, Pennsylvania, who is himself OCD, noted her obsessive organizing of her environment: towels and washcloths folded military-style in threes in her bathroom. A pop-culture referencer saw William Hung. An ugly, unimaginative woman I know remarked simply, "Hideous!" A guy who grew up overweight and repressed and then, through drug abuse and sex with important strangers, transformed himself into someone rich and chic and perfect and now sees potential everywhere proclaimed, "She's so beautiful!"

Her open and unusual heart acts as a mirror. Go look her up and see what you think and then you will see who you are.

A&E Channel

The Romans had never seen anything like Attila and his Huns. They ate meat raw, fucked in the street, and you couldn't trust a deal with them as far as you could spit. The Romans were arguing about God in the parlor; the Huns were so tough they didn't even have *houses*.

The funny thing is, our finely-featured and, I don't mean to be rude, but delicate-bodied A&E narrators are obviously totally identifying with the nomadic barbarians, not the Roman scholars. We switch between narrators, each one more excited and more disturbing. Their years of university training enables them to (just barely) keep their lust shrouded under polysyllabic words and a slumped-over posture, but we know what's really going on. Don't pan, cameraman, don't pan! Their favorite scene to recreate is filmed in silhouette—the hairy men on hairy beasts rising over the hills. Hordes at sunset.

Both the Huns and the Mongols were very close to their horses, the narrators inform us. Horses were their only means of transportation (and it's not like you could just walk to the corner store—it was loot or nothing for dinner if a crop wasn't in). They also provided the mare's milk the Huns drank and made cheese from. No wonder stealing a man's horse was punishable by death. You can't just steal the

equivalent to a man's car, groceries, and companion in one fell swoop and expect a merciful sentence. Besides, when there are no buildings, how can you put someone in jail? Anyway, there was virtually no crime under Khan's rule.

Attila died in his mid-fifties on his wedding night. He got completely wasted and partied serious with his much, much younger bride until he hemorrhaged from the nose and drowned in his own blood. His people showed their sorrow by tearing off their clothes, cutting their hair, and mutilating their bodies. (Imagine doing that for our president if he popped off tomorrow?) They said womanly wailing was not mourning enough—blood must flow like a river. Genghis, who killed his first man at 13 and escaped every assassin's knife and arrow, finally met the fitting end of falling off perhaps his one friend in the world, his horse.

In one generation, the Mongols massacred or assimilated three-fourths of the known world. Imagine that happening today? The funny thing is, once they established control, it was great: a flowering of civilization. All roads open, tolerance of every religion, communication and exchange of ideas between different peoples who hadn't even known of each other's existence before Khan's campaign of terror. But A&E didn't cover that aspect of Khan's rule. I had to read about that in the history books, because our bespectacled A&E guys in ruffled shirts and bowties don't give a hoot about peacetime. They're such blood-perverts!

Lucia Di Lammermoor

I took my preteen daughter to the opera, and my reason for doing so—wanting her to want more than pop culture tells her she can expect—was entirely fulfilled. Listen to this: “With ecstasy, he promises his eternal faith. When he is close to me, heaven opens up.”

I am more worried than ever about the future of this art form. The audience is so old the announcer asked them to turn their pagers off. (This is not a joke.) And Sadie found a poop in the ladies’ room (but not in a toilet). They can’t control their phones or their bowels. Sadie said, “I’d expect to find a poop at Walmart, not where everyone wears pearls.” Then when we got out, there were two ambulances.

Abduction From the Seraglio

The booklet calls this opera by Mozart “hilarious.” It’s funny to picture bewigged people from so long ago yukking it up. I thought it was the best one I’ve been to. (I think that every time.)

Alexandra Batsios’s high notes decapitated me. It was difficult driving home with no eyeballs, but instinct guided.

George Bush

I really like George Bush's paintings! They look like they're done by a sad, demented, gentle soul. The bath and shower self-portraits are so vulnerable for any man, but especially a leader of men. His bizarre perspective makes it look like another man who looks like him is behind him in the shower. I find his work very emotional.

In his collection of portraits of veterans, every subject looks like the painter in some way. I think it's the confusion in the facial expression. Tremulous. Befuddled. These are men the artist was responsible for sending to war and having horror thrust deep inside their souls, and now he tries to capture it in art. The guilt he is guilty of creating...like if God made a mistake, and now tells the story of the ripples of pain he made, over and over. I imagine he wants to take their place, and that's why he puts himself in all their eyes.

The man is haunted.

The work is naïve and genuine and ungoverned. It's not, as some have suggested, simply that GWB lacks skill. That is true, but, too, there is a feeling, an urgency, a half-formed wish, pulsing to express itself; skill or not skill matters nothing to this deep a pulse.

Squeezing past the pain is something puppyish. This guy is always inappropriately throwing up, passing out, dancing at a cop's funeral, making art, making jokes. He's a clown. I appreciate clowns. I see him as a tragic figure, never wanting or knowing how to wear the mantle he inherited and could not escape of prince and murderer.

Costes

I gotta say something about this guy in every book I write. He did a show in America in the early 2000s where the three Frenchies performed a triple pee arc vomit exchange into each other's mouths that was so olfactorally and otherwise overwhelming that my friend Elizabeth Rose passed out and split her lip open on the concrete and it was flapping like a fish gill so I had to take her to the ER.

That was only about ten minutes into the show! God knows what went on in that room after our departure. Well, maybe not God.

Imposter

Our hero thinks he's an Earth guy at war with aliens but now he's been "caught" as an alien spy implanted with human memories, senses, and knowledge. He's being tortured by humans, and he's trying to convince his friends, all watching, that he really is a human and the torturing government is wrong.

Sample dialogue: "Knock, knock. Who's there? Not you."

Under threat of death, he "admits" he *is* an alien and says there's a bomb inside him set to go off when the human body gets killed. And when he gets them disquieted at the possibility, he grabs a torture device and kills his captors and escapes through an air shaft. (Note to self: When constructing my torture room, *no air shafts.*) Now he's escaped to Earth's surface where the aliens have destroyed everything, and that's where they live.

Someone in uniform explains: "It believes it is human. It knows fear. It bleeds. The defect is the genius of the replication. Its implanted fear *will* cause it to make a mistake."

Now some mutant people captured him. Will he convince them he's one of them more successfully than he convinced the humans he was one of *them*? *Is* he (either)?

This is so similar to how perceived identity is used to bully you by all different segments of society, each in their own ways, when you're deemed mentally ill.

This movie was too dangerous to get a decent budget. It would have toppled the hegemony, had a million citizens been exposed to it.

The Big Year

Jack Black is a 36-year-old divorced guy living with his parents and he saved up \$5,000 for his “big year” where you try to sight the most birds in one year. He asks his dad for a loan of \$5,000 more and his dad ridicules him and kicks him out, so his mom sneaks out and gives him her credit card with a \$6,000 limit and he goes all around the world chasing rare birds and he says it’s the best time of his life. Now I want to have a “big year” birding and go into passionate debt.

Germans

Tons of Germans at the beach. Damn, but we are a good-looking people. We smoke too much, though. People always accuse us of being mad. I'm not! Our mouths are just upside down. All Germans have the upside down mouth.

I'm totally lying. I am mad all the time; we all are. We just tell you we're not to make you feel bad for thinking it. We're mad at lateness and foolishness.

Sadie: "Remember when you thought the gym teacher was going to yell at the parents at drop-off who were just sitting there and you were so excited, you stuck around to watch, and then when you saw he was smiling and just talking to them, I thought you were going to cry."

Nick Cave talking about German women in an interview: "I come from Australia. We don't have that kind of... We don't have that kind of... [grimaces]"

My second husband drew me a map for a shortcut to our daughter's new school. It was squiggles and loops, none of it labeled. It looked like a sketch of a Heffalump. This is why we couldn't be married. He is of Italian descent, and is nice, leisurely, meandering. I am none of those qualities, ever. They look like nonsense to me.

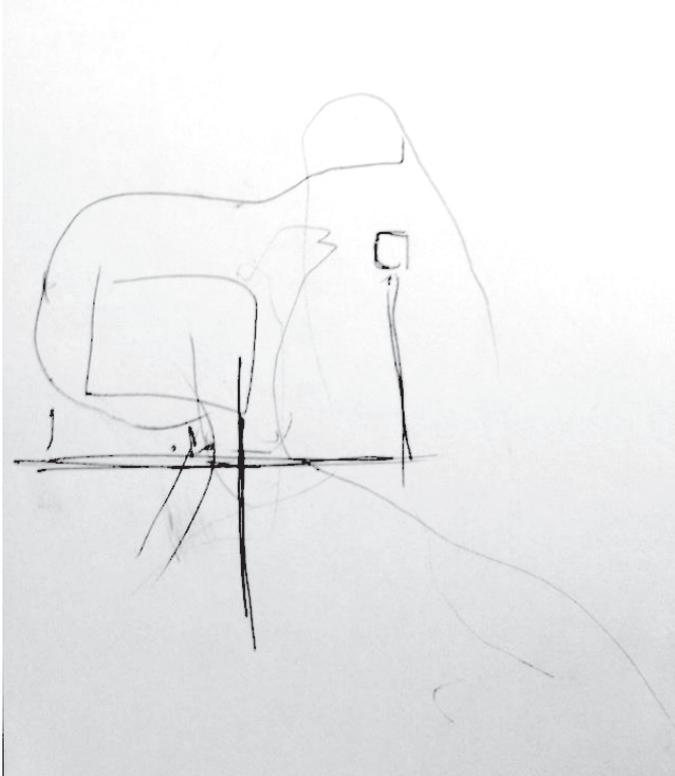


Figure 7: An infuriating map.

The Irish, The Italians, The Polish

The Irish are really good-looking. Except when they're ugly.

The Italians are pretty much good-looking and ugly at the same time. My daughter is part Italian. I can be looking at her and think, *She should model*, and then there's a shadow shift or a change in her expression and I'm like, *Oh my god! She's kind of frightening.*

Rin Kelly reports: "My boyfriend's Polish relatives are grumpy as hell. His family was rent asunder by an argument over the proper way to make pierogi and they *still* don't all talk."

My third husband is half-Pole, and he thinks everyone (governments, businesses, handymen, school administrations, neighbors) is not doing it right, whatever it is they're doing, and then he says the right way.

Poles have big, powerful jaws, in my experience. It's from all that espousing. My husband would laugh and laugh like a villain sitting there on our green couch while I snuck peeks at my watch, adding up in my mind the shrinkage of minutes left till he was due at whatever appointment he had, with degrees of grimness slowly filling my face like drops into an already full glass of water threatening to spill.

Hip-Hop Atlanta

“**W**hen Shea walked in with Scrappy, I feel some kind of way,” said the lady. “My left leg is going all Elvis Presley. I done feel some kind of way.”

Grammatically, it’s certainly original. But communicatively, it’s dead on. I, too, have done felt some kind of way, including a leg going all Elvis Presley. I know what she means! (Shea and Scrappy are a man and a woman, I’m not sure which is which, but the shaking lady used to be with whichever one is the man.)

Well, I did *not* know what she meant. Turns out Scrappy isn’t even the shaker’s ex. He is the baby daddy of her friend. She loves her friend so much, she started shaking just thinking about her being done wrong. I did not know Elvis was also vengeance.

The Swans Live, 2016

Michael Gira made faces like an orangutan or a dementia patient, under those gray, greasy locks. He drank down a bottle like a desperate person. He danced great. Made a joke. One. But a two-parter. They were trying out all new material, and he said it “feels like having sex with six condoms on. Not that I have sex anymore.” The music was beautiful.

The bass player looks like a mountain herder. Actually, more than one Swan looks like a mountain herder. The rest look like goats.

Reader's Digest

My ex-husband brought over a certain periodical. Someone mysteriously gave him a subscription. He tried to give it to his wife's grandmother, and she said, "I don't want this!" And he said, "I know who would want this! Lisa!" And I do! Listen to this: "50 Secrets Your Pet Won't Tell You," "I Was Buried Alive in a Grain Bin," "What It's Like to be a Personal Assistant," and "How Not to Die." I mean, come on!

A sample:

Dogs wag to the right when they see something they like and to the left when confronted with something they want to get away from.

Cats get upset with the laser pointer if you don't give them a toy at the end. It's like they failed at their job.

The reason dogs circle before pooping: They're getting aligned with the earth's magnetic field. Don't interrupt. (Is that why they so often manage to get a clean poop out with no need for TP? They harness the force of gravity?)

When you're getting your pet spayed, ask them

to remove just her ovaries, not her uterus. Less invasive. That's how they do it in Europe. Damn American barbarians.

In your young pet's first 100 days, introduce them to 100 new people of different sizes, genders, and ethnicities. I hope you can find all those people! Good luck, New Hampshire!

And of those 100 people, make sure you include some in hats and/or sunglasses.

Veterinarians surgically remove hundreds of pairs of women's worn underwear from dogs' bellies every year.

When meeting a new dog, crouch down and look away. "Reach out your hand and that may as well be a meat cleaver."

If your cat sprays outside the box, it's not to irritate you. It's because she's stressed out. "It may be a new person, a new pet, or even a new piece of furniture that seems to be encroaching on [her] territory."

An uncovered litter box is preferable, so pet can map out her escape route. Pooping and peeing is a vulnerable moment.

If your cat stiffens when you touch him, just stop. You're stressing him out, but he's trying to be polite.

Now, on to the drama:

The enormous grain bins that dot the Iowa landscape store enough dried corn to swallow up a body completely, squeezing the breath and life from a person in seconds. [...] In 2010 alone, 26 Americans were killed in silo accidents.

On a Wednesday last June, however, 23-year-old Baker wasn't thinking about the risks. [...] Baker stood in the 60,000-bushel bin using a length of PVC pipe to try to break up the chunks of rotten corn that were blocking the flow. It was a sweltering day, and it was 137 degrees inside the massive cylinder of corrugated steel. [...] Baker felt the corn beneath his feet give way.

The pressure on his body was enormous. For Baker, it was an awful sensation, to feel himself squeezed with equal force across every inch of his body. It felt like being strangled by a thousand boa constrictors. [...] Every breath was exhausting. He was hyperventilating, which didn't help either. Still, he was breathing.

That's all you're getting! You want the end to that story, go get your own ex-husband with a mystery subscription who knows you want it.

Oh, okay, I'll take pity on you and sum up. Dad realized Baker was missing. Went looking for him, but he was *buried in corn* and even though he was yelling, no one could hear him because he was *muffled by corn*. Dad and a helper dug

for him anyway, and the firemen came, and everyone was digging and eventually found a hand.

That was only the beginning of their troubles in the rescue operation. They cut holes in the outside of the silo but corn only trickled out, and every time they uncovered Baker's head, *more* corn would get suctioned in and rebury him. They worked all night long and then he was free. He spent two days in the hospital. His heart was exhausted. The doctors said if he'd been five years older or squashed five minutes longer, he'd be dead. As soon as he got out of the hospital, he was right back to work.

Goddamn farmers. They're a dying breed. They need a raise!

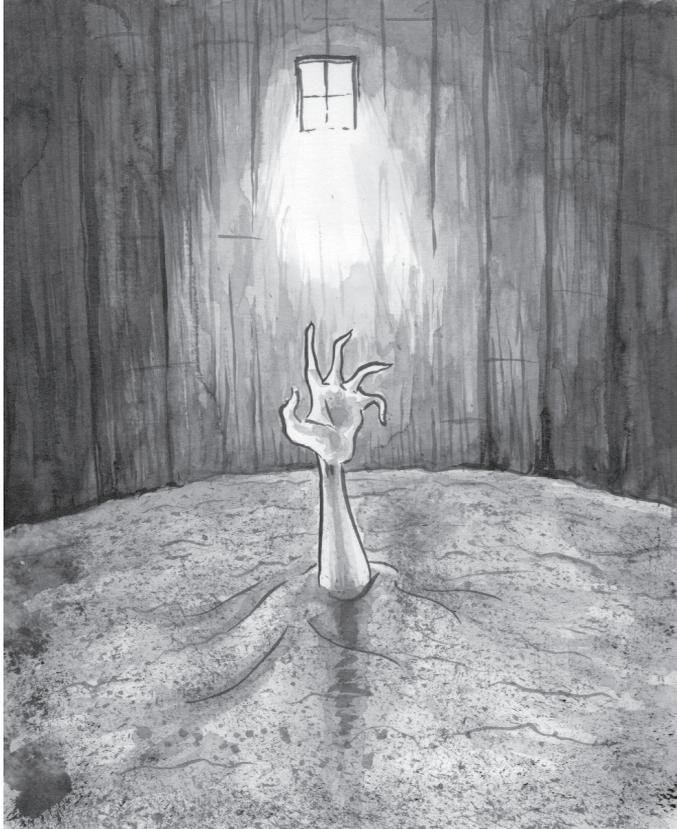


Figure 8: Sundown.

Days of Our Lives

“Feeling optimistic, Laura?” Stefano says to the mousy woman handcuffed and chained (a ridiculously large chain) to a chair in a secret room. “Eh, Laura? Feeling optimistic?” he prompts. (I mean, who *would* just then?) Just to punctuate the situation, he unnecessarily commands, “Well, *don’t*.”

Stefano is a destroyer of faith and decency, and because he’s in that secret room and everyone believes he died in the explosion, he can do it however slowly he likes. Actually, there’s one person who does believe he’s alive—a black psychic who wears a pure white wig and speaks in a shivery accent. She feels his vibrations of pure evil. And let me tell you, so do I.

One time Stefano actually killed someone with his gaze. The guy backed away from him, terrified beyond belief at being stared at in such a manner, right out the window, and fell to his death. Stefano leisurely approached the window to look with fondness at the inelegant corpse below, murmuring, “Beautiful...*beautiful*.”

Franco is the new foreign evil man on *Days of Our Lives*. He’s young and good-looking, with quite a chest on him. I prefer my demonic assassins not quite so fresh. It’s more effective when the hideous ugliness inside their soul has had time to permeate the outside, leaving fatty pockets of

overindulgence under the eyes and around the middle. It's so much worse to be mauled by a bloated man with pasty skin and a toupee. And "so much worse" is what these shows are all about.

And the triumph of evil. That's also what these supposedly Christian shows allow. Nowhere else on TV does the bad guy get away with it indefinitely. Even if other bad guys and gals look glamorous in a dizzying, seedy spin before their fall, the fall is coming. Not here. Today a psychic held hands with a kidnap victim as both screamed extremely loudly with the memory of pain; then the scene switched to a private jet containing the young vixen secretly responsible for ordering the torture. She was blowing a party horn and saying, "You have no idea just how happy I am at this moment." Instead of the gas chamber, this red-haired she-beast gets caviar.

The right choice (coming clean) will buy you redemption and a prison sentence—or at least the loss of your spouse's love when he/she discovers you've been lying all along about being pregnant and/or tied to the mob. Make the wrong choice (murdering the old lady so as to keep your lies hidden...for now), and you will be lost without hope in the bottomless pit of badness. Which is not without its satisfactions. In fact, taking the wrong path involves all kinds of interesting tributaries, such as faking your own death or performing experimental laser surgery to make somebody who knows too much forget. When you're in a bottomless pit, it's no longer a question of "if" you could do some awful act. You instead put your energy into contemplating *how*.

Adele

Her whole thing is regret. I thought she was great the first time I heard her, but I kept waiting for her to get past her loss of a guy and a time that I don't even think she really liked that much. But she just keeps talking about it! No one is worth your whole career. Every time she comes on, I keep listening for the promise of a good song to become true. It never does.

The Murder Castle of H. H. Holmes

The owner of a hotel in Chicago killed guests for *four years* and was only caught by chance when the IRS looked in on him for fictitious horses he was selling. They entered the forbidden top floor, where they discovered “body parts and chains.”

Didn't these guests have families? Why was no one looking at their credit card bills and raiding the hotel? Because this was before credit cards. Back when you were free to spree. And change identity. (Evidence suggests he was also Jack the Ripper, during an extended visit to the U.K.)

He said matter-of-factly about why he did it: “Some people are born to paint; I was born with the devil in me.”

The Real Thing

A married couple, aging socialites, have run out of money and try to model for an artist. They're not really what he needs but they work earnestly and have nowhere else to go, so he strings them along for a while and then discharges them with an insult. They stay away for three days and then come back and silently try to show themselves useful to him in any way at all. It's winter and they have no money to heat their apartment. He lets them work for a week, more as servants or waitstaff than as models, then sends them on their way for good. What will become of them? The artist admits that he took some pleasure in watching these beautiful people grovel, and then in the end says, "Oh well, it was an experience!" Vicious. I thought I liked Henry James when I was young, but I think I must have mistaken my hate for like. I loved books so much I would forgive an author anything back then. I guess I still do.

The artist doesn't have the excuse (not that this would be one, anyway) of the downtrodden suddenly finding themselves in a position to try on the boots and stomp those by whom they were once stomped. The artist was kind of outside class, and always did okay for himself. His life—his joy, his humiliation, his desperation or exultation—was never about rank or money. And odd though it sounds,

what with the trips on yachts and the shopping in Paris, I think neither was life about rank or money for these socialites. They were children, charming hangers-on who never planned for any future, who have run out of future.

Lover Beware

There's this guy who invented a defense weapon for the government and some people kidnapped and tortured him and his assistant and killed his assistant but he escaped by starting a fire by an ingenious method I can't remember, but his leg was crushed under a door so now he uses a cane. He ran away to the most obscure little town he could find, hoping no one else could find it. He felt drawn to a neighbor's house by the sea because they were using some weird preservative in their paint, so it showed no sign of wear. He was really bad-tempered and didn't talk to anyone or even shop in person.

But he felt compelled one night to creep up the cliff (on his bum leg) and inspect the paint up close. The gates opened up for him and the dogs did not attack. He met the owner, who was a witch. I bet you didn't see *that* coming! So anyway, they kind of fell instantly in love, so later that night *she* crept up to his house (wearing a black catsuit) and she saw three assassins! One was trying to get in the guy's bedroom window, and he hit him over the head with his cane. The other two were crawling through the woods with rifles, and she used her witch powers to send all these ticks over to bite them.

I hope I haven't given too much away, but I *am* only on page six, so there's plenty left to happen if you want to read it yourself. I found my copy for one dollar at Goodwill.

The Flying Guillotine

I can't understand this Chinese (?) idea of revenge. Because the One-Armed Boxer is good at his job and killed the blind kung fu guy's disciples—who, by the way, were trying to kill the boxer!—revenge must be gotten on him and he has to get his head cut off. Can't we just get along?

The blind guy leaves his mountain retreat by using his flying guillotine to decapitate a bird, whose head he uses as a bomb on his shack (??), and he leaves his pet monkey behind chained to a post with no food. It's going to starve! He sets out for a famous tournament and mistakenly kills a one-armed bum. Then he says, screw it, "I'm going to kill every one-armed man I find."

Why so angry? The One-Armed Boxer says kung fu is for spiritual health. I don't know about the blind man's spiritual health if he leaves his monkey to starve.

The blind man's ears quiver, he can turn his head 360°, and he wears a swastika. The only thing that can distract him is a cageful of birds flying straight for his face, chirping.

50 Sci Fi Movies For \$9 From Walmart, Watched All in a Row Until I Got So Insane I Went All The way Through To So Sane

Trooper Jack Deth is sent back in time (1985) to battle Whistler, an evil magnate who uses his psychic powers to trance and control armies of citizens. So far, a muscle man in short shorts tried to kill him with a tanning booth!!!

Next up is *Equilibrium*: “In a futuristic society, the top enforcer (Christian Bale) misses a dose of an emotion-blocking drug and begins to realize that things are not as they seem.” These are just like real life!

Now the *Salamander Men From Outer Space*, disguised as a Japanese avant garde dance troupe, hiss a brain-freezing radiation.

Now it's *The Day Time Ended*, from around 1969, and there is a boozing, turned-on, tanned-and-bleached grandpa and grandma in their bathrobes taking a sexy stroll on the beach. They don't make grandpas and grandmas like that anymore. There's a tiny claymation alien, and he's kind of sexy, too! (Actually, everyone was sexy in '69.) Then these giant claymation creatures that looked like godzillas wrestled and chased a horse.

Actually, I don't think that was the title. Because now we're watching the next one, and the 1970s lady's watch stopped and *now* it's the day time ended.

Now it's *The Head* from 1959. The opening is a hunchback nun in a castle in the woods and a creep peeping in the window. They're very *slow* in 1959. And the speaking is so much more elegant, as is the architecture, clothing, facial expressions....

Supercollider. A scientist collected data from the future, to make money off the stock market, but it had all these strange reactions. ("Created a fork in reality.") There are no more iPhones, children are dead, or never born? People are having memories and therapists call it brain trauma and medicate them.

EVERY SINGLE MOVIE ON THESE DISCS IS SIMPLY REALISTIC.

Well, mayhap I spoke too soon. The alien in this one is a walking glistening vagina. With waving fallopian tube arms. Oh my god. The camera just panned up, and the thing has an anus for a head!!!!!!!!!!!! The astronaut is terrified. Glistening anus!



Figure 9: Vagina anus alien.

Manyika

All the fairies love each other and to work, though I don't know what their work is. It appears to be frolicking in the river while wearing white dresses, or nudie. They also perpetually sing (in Tagalog) about work, and they share. If a man is tired, he sleeps under a giant mushroom.

There's one bad-girl fairy, Marie. Unrepentant. She wants to "own every little thing." The queen, wearing garland on her head, banishes her to the human world to learn her lesson. She lands in the humble home of a nice boy and girl. By night, Marie is a Cabbage Patch doll. By day she is a genie, but in human form. She gives the brother and sister any wishes. They go shopping for so much food. Yet there is no refrigerator or electricity, so the meat is going to go bad. Well, Marie gives them a refrigerator and turns it on. But at midnight everything she gives them goes away, so all that meat is going to go bad anyway! (She didn't give them the meat, she gave them cash to buy the meat. So the now-rotting meat will stay but the cash will disappear. Some cashier is probably going to go to prison over this!)

The next day, Marie helps the brother's basketball team win by cheating-magic. The brother then races his new car that's about to disappear with the other racer's girlfriend as the prize. The once-kind siblings turn abusive towards

Marie, treating her like a slave. So Marie gets mad and leaves and changes some garbage kids that are eating out of a can (in a quiet, orderly fashion) into really tasty food. Then she invisibly plucks a bouquet of flowers out of a street vendor's hands and turns it into candy raining down on all the children, and they're all grabbing it like cockroaches swarming. Marie, you dark lord.

Oasis (A Korean Love Story)

If I hadn't read the synopsis, I wouldn't even have known that the boyfriend was mentally disabled and that what the girlfriend had was cerebral palsy, any more than you are aware in other movies of characters having high IQs or healthy bodies. I mean, it's not something you think about normally. And it's not what I thought about with these two.

Their goddamn families. The goddamn police. The goddamn society.

Everyone has dignity. Some people, some systems, pretend certain people don't deserve dignity and certain other people deserve all the deference. The exploited people themselves sometimes don't realize their own dignity. These two do. Not that they were able to communicate it to anyone but each other and inside themselves. But still, that is more than a lot of people ever find (I imagine). I envied them.

Angeles Y Querubines

On the TV in a Mexican restaurant, an old man with an open wound on his calf let a lizard lick it, and he smiled. I don't speak Spanish so I have no idea what that was about. Later I tried to find the movie on YouTube by typing in "lizard licks leg wound," but the closest I got was some naked kids alone on an island. They found a ball that I guess was a bomb and it went off and everyone was dead but then it didn't explode and then they were playing with it. The narrator chuckled and explained what was going on, but there were no subtitles. I was yelling, "What?! What?!" I got so worked up.

One time my two friends, both named Rachel, watched an subtitled Bollywood movie with me and the louder Rachel made up her own narration and it was very satisfying.

Gene Gregorits

It took a long time for my books, ordered directly from the author, to arrive. The crazy fool kept getting drunk or locked up (jail or loony bin) or chopped up or beat up instead of making it all the way to the post office. He got evicted at one point, was homeless in Florida, and my \$45 went to booze for him and food for his cat or a declarative present for his beloved in Australia. Other people's book money would be given away to an even homelesser person or become an impulse purchase (a special pair of flip-flops with a built-in bottle opener). Each time he failed to send the books, he would beg forgiveness, and pledge his honor, and then, in a different mood, call me a cunt and claim I was killing him.

When the package at last arrived, my editor-eyes started bulging out of my head. Too many words, too many ideas, too many place-jumps and time-jumps and back again. Then I started getting into the pace of it, and I put down the red pencil. Reading him was like surfing the lushest wave bobbing with garbage, sea creatures, other surfers, dead bodies, seaweed, tar, lightning bolts, just everything. Talking with him was exactly the same: He was bursting with greed and generosity, perambulatory, outside of regular life. A cowboy. He didn't drive, had no bank account, no credit card, no retirement account, no student loans. He

was so weird, so without ID, he even got denied welfare. He swam with dolphins and manatees. He seemed so happy when he wasn't suicide-/murder-threatening. Being compared to Miller, Salinger, Kerouac annoyed him, yet his books emboldened me in the same way those three did at 17; they make me want to dive in, rushing. Into what? Into everything!

I was on the phone with him and he yelled, "Hey, lookin' good!" to someone who passed, and then he told the passerby that I was his ex-wife. (Why? I don't know.) He asked me to hang on, so I just eavesdropped on their conversation. (Her voice made her sound about a thousand years old.) It lasted long enough for me to let the cat out and back in, paint my nails, update my Facebook. When he picked the phone back up, I said something innocuous like, how is your day going?

He said: "I woke up in a panic that I'd lost everything, ruined it. I couldn't find my cigarettes, and that was a bad sign. I went to the store and bought another pack. That's how I know I've made it, that I can afford another pack when I lose one. I went to my neighbors' and my pack was in their couch, and that was a very bad sign. They said, 'Do you know what you did last night?' and I was afraid. Then they said, 'You cuddled and cried all night long.' That was the best possible outcome, the best thing I could have heard! I was afraid I'd had sex with my neighbor's wife. Again."

I said, "And then you found out your night-self didn't betray your day-girl."

"Right. And everything was saved. For now."

"Your morning was like a Philip K. Dick story. Clues and signs."

“I really like the idea of him, but I can’t read him because he’s such a lousy writer.”

I said, “I don’t need good writing.” And then I wondered if he would apply that to himself, since I like his so much. But he kept it to Dick.

“He was an ideas guy, and he was so brimming with them, he rushed through the writing, I think. Then he got religion!”

“Well, he was a mystic.”

“A mystic! He was a speed freak!”

“Same difference.”

“I love you, Lisa. I love you like a sister.”

“I love you like a brother. A sexy brother.”

What I meant by not needing literature (or music or movies) to be good is...all I want is for it to make me want to stop reading or listening or watching, put it down, and go out. Go out and live, and forget about it, and remember about everything I love. Art is not there to stroke its own ego or achieve its own apex. It’s there to remind you of what’s beyond itself, and to go get it, whatever it is: Go eat it, go do it, go be it.

My first in-person impressions of meeting him were: He is a person without skin, a mind with no skull, a heart with no ribcage. He just says things. He pleads. He sulks. He spouts. He is exposed. A pulsating ego. Drugs. The urgent need to please. The urgent seeking of comfort, reassurance. Constant calculations. Doubt. Magnetism. A thousand old scars for a body and one giant wound of a personality.

Glowing. Looking for connection like a lost child watches tall and hurrying passersby, trying to stop them with his eyes.

He kissed me even though it wasn't like that between us. The ways we did connect weren't enough for him, could never be enough, he would always be reaching for more into nothingness. I hoped he would calm down and quit abusing substances so much and just sit with himself and write it all down. Because, I thought, if he doesn't channel this energy, these thoughts, this *need*, it's going to keep conducting in a loop and fry him to a crisp.

The second time I met him in person, he cut his arm in front of a bunch of people at a joint book reading I'd arranged in Rhode Island. He hit an artery and it spurted all over the audience and my books for sale. The crowd fled. "This is what you came here for, isn't it?" he bellowed, bewildered. Almost everyone was gone. He forgot, or didn't care, that I was going on next and had put some money into this and some of those people had never even heard of him before. I realized women are not exactly real to him. But I didn't mind. Disaster is always more interesting than success. And I know I'm real. I don't need anyone to believe it.

Our lives coiled around each other's. He contributed to a book of mine, and I to his. My friends became his, and his mine, including his Australian girlfriend and then the American ones. At some point, he would try to get me to agree that his girlfriends (each one, in a row) were psycho and to denounce them in these weird powerdramas that people who feel alien are compelled to create and recreate

to keep everyone around them off-balance so no one will look too closely at them and discover what—they feel—is horribly wrong with them. At least that's why I did it when I was young. But I won't shun, and each time I didn't, the tension grew.

With my third failure to cast out an ex of his, he put on YouTube a video of himself urinating on my books in a garbage can, calling me a sociopath, a liar, a thief, and a bad parent. He has a son, who he abandoned. Sociopath, liar, thief, and bad parent are all things he is. He is so blind to women as human beings, he couldn't find a single legitimate insult for me, and used ones that applied to himself instead.

It's not possible to understand life only positively... You have to know some things you don't want to, too. For every Dalai Lama there has to be a Richard Wright. When you silence expressions of brutality, you mute the intensity of gentleness as well; you can muffle all or none. Understanding stealing tells you more about generosity. Taking and giving are two faces of the same impulse. Both are interactions. They're not opposites. We need guides for how to address the darkness inside us just as we need guides for kindness. I mean speak directly to it, not from above, and not to say, "Here's how you get rid of it." Darkness is a living thing, and it needs to be acknowledged as itself, it needs to be recognized, not just gotten past. There is no getting past anything without first seeing it. I thought Gene was one of these guides. I thought deep down he knew what he was doing, and that he also knew that, sooner or

later, his explorations would mean sacrificing his freedom, friendships, career opportunities.

So even though he'd literally pissed on our friendship and that was over, I still believed in him, in what I thought he was trying to accomplish. It was about a month later that he was charged with rape and kidnapping of a 17-year-old Craigslist hookup. Then women contacted me saying he raped them. Two friends and a stranger. All three women described having had sex with him willingly, and would have again, but at some point he needed to hurt them and make it something they didn't want. The time frame stretched over a decade. The woman I didn't know had ended up in the hospital with an infected bite wound. When she tried to press charges, he'd skipped town and was untraceable.

Ultimately, two-dozen women came forward from all over the country. Most never reported him at the time, and the few who did couldn't locate him, or got laughed off by police. My article on his writing in *Vice*, combined with the news coverage on the charges brought by the 17-year-old's parents—the girl herself said she was there willingly and was in love with him—made him findable, and several women wrote letters to the court, and I imagine that's part of what caused the judge to issue a ten-year sentence for what some offenders get probation for.

When Gene wrote, "I am a rapist," I thought he was telling the truth about something he felt inside him, something you and I have inside us if we look far enough down. I thought he was describing mutually fucked up relationships. But he was not telling the truth about complicated turns of events between damaged people. He was at first,

maybe, with his first two books. He changed...with sick fans, with meth. With getting away with hurting people. He started writing the women as bitter hags using him for thrills and demanding sex. Maybe they were, maybe that was their sad part in the dynamic, but he did not say his part. He insulted and ridiculed the women to distract from what he did and who he was, and to blame the women for what he did and who he was.

Probably he didn't change. Probably he was lying really well by making deliberate selections of truth (and neglecting others) the whole time. We all have to do that as writers. But you're supposed to use lies to make doorways in walls, not to board over windows so you control what people see and can't see. I feel bitterly tricked and foolish.

Camille Pissarro

He was one of the first Impressionists, and for years the critics and the public ridiculed his efforts. He was getting it at home and on the job! Yet despite the chaos, both Pissarro's self and paintings were serene. He stopped using blacks and browns entirely, that's how unshadowed the man was.

He married a woman “of peasant stock” (according to historians) who understood neither him nor his art (according to the collection of letters that was preserved), and they produced several boisterous sons. He had a hard time providing for his family, plus they were always interrupting him. He never yelled at them, though.

Germans drove Camille Pissarro out of his country into England in a hurry; he had to leave his paintings behind—and the Germans *destroyed them all*. These were the days before reproductions, before technology made it impossible for any image to be really gone forever. What a hole that must have opened inside Camille Pissarro!

He wrote to his sons every single day they were apart. What a dad! I found his book of letters all banged up for \$5 in a museum. It was enormous. I don't care for Impressionism; there's nothing to sink my teeth into. Also, it was an old book so the images of his paintings were in black and white

(well, gray and gray). I became interested and looked some up on my computer. They were nice, but not captivating.

Just now, I looked again. *Epping Landscape* looks like you could walk right into it. Walk onto that dirt path behind the children, walk into the afternoon, 1892. Then I looked at *Autumn* and wow, that yellow-leafed tree! It is bathed in his loving gaze! I keep looking and looking and looking.

Prisoners Singing on YouTube

These songs electrocuted my heart. When you compare them to studio songs, it's like comparing a person to a picture of a person in a magazine. Someone sneaks a crappy phone camera in. There's barely room for two guys to sit next to each other. Against a peeling white wall, they wear loose, dirty, white clothes and they're black with black kerchiefs over their faces.

Here are some rap lines (while the other guy beatboxes and croons and taps). Each line could be a whole song, but it's just one shitty detail in a shitty life.

Trying to feed my family they took as a threat.

My son died.

Shit you throw away, these n-----s in here would kill for.

This is my life, it makes me sick

Barbed wire only make me sick.

Let my mind picture a n----- fucking my bitch

While I'm beating my dick.

Then the other guy sings really pretty over and over:

Everything that happens wasn't meant to be.

A different rapper says:

Respectfully, I say, "Fuck the world."

Another singer laments:

*Damn I hate my life
Damn I hate my life
Every day's the same, oh
I hate my life.*

Third repetition in, his voice breaks and I think he's crying.

I wanted to include the full word in the lyrics; the publisher heard me out and still said no, she's not going to pay to put more copies of that word into the world. But she said I could explain why I did want it. It's this: The prisoners took great care and personal risk to record and smuggle out and then spread what they were experiencing to those who are not at all in their world. They're describing a life absolutely stripped. As raw as if their skin got peeled off. They lost every goddamn thing inside the prison walls and outside, too. Telling their story is all they have left. For that moment in their life, at least. When you're locked up, so many terrible things can happen to you *because* the prison system is able to block what gets communicated out and in. You're faceless, rightsless, and voiceless. Letters to and from inmates get words crossed out or cut out by guards.

I feel in league with the guards using dashes. I feel like I'm doing harm. Which is exactly the same reason the publisher *is* using dashes. To do no harm.

All By Myself, Alone

For the first time in my life I ran out of books to read at night. I was bereaved. Bookstores are as scarce as raindrops here in the desert, so I had to go to Walmart. All they had was a big-font Bible, which I've already read, two other editions of big-font Bibles, some bodice rippers, some Young Adult, that Comey book, and one copy left of an old lady who goes on a cruise and befriends another old lady with an expensive necklace who gets *murdered*. The murderer is on the ship! They're in the middle of the ocean! The wily old lady still left alive has to figure out who is the murderer before the murderer finds out she's finding out. I hope this is my real life when I retire.

Bluebeard's Castle

The striking images and precise performances of *Bluebeard's Castle* left me cold. As did the striking images of ourselves mounting the stairs in the wall-mirror at the top at the fearsomely elegant Metropolitan Opera House in Manhattan. Him in a tux with slicked-back hair and a perfect face, me having had my hair and makeup done, and he bought me a gown. I prefer what is found, not presented. Or not even what is found, but promises to be. Eternally. What I just have to believe is there.

I want the heavy feel of believing inside the lightness of no proof. I want chance. I want a piece of art or a relationship striving so hard and piling up wishes so high that it *has* to fail, at least in becoming what it was supposed to. The wonder is in what it ends up being instead. There is something underneath that is not what we wanted, but pushes itself up anyway, invisibly, because it must. Something yearning to be known. Don't give it to me. It's not yours or mine to give; it's not yours or mine to get. It's a line between us, between anyone and anyone, disintegrating and regenerating, always new and never complete.

Like how in old films they didn't have enough pixels, or something I don't understand about high definition, and you couldn't *exactly* read the expression on the character's

face, you read what you needed to in the shadow or in the washed out area. You collaborate with the cameraman and the actor to make this movie in real time, different every time. Once anything achieves total clarity, we stop looking beyond what we can see, listening for what we can't quite hear. And that which lies just outside our senses, the original-never-always, no longer chased with flashlights, no longer hiding and fleeing and teasing, becomes inert, a lump in the dark left to starve. In art and in love.

Bluebeard committed necrophilia on his bride in a ditch in the backyard on their wedding night while other mutilated ghost-women roamed, watering the roses with their blood and making the stone walls weep.

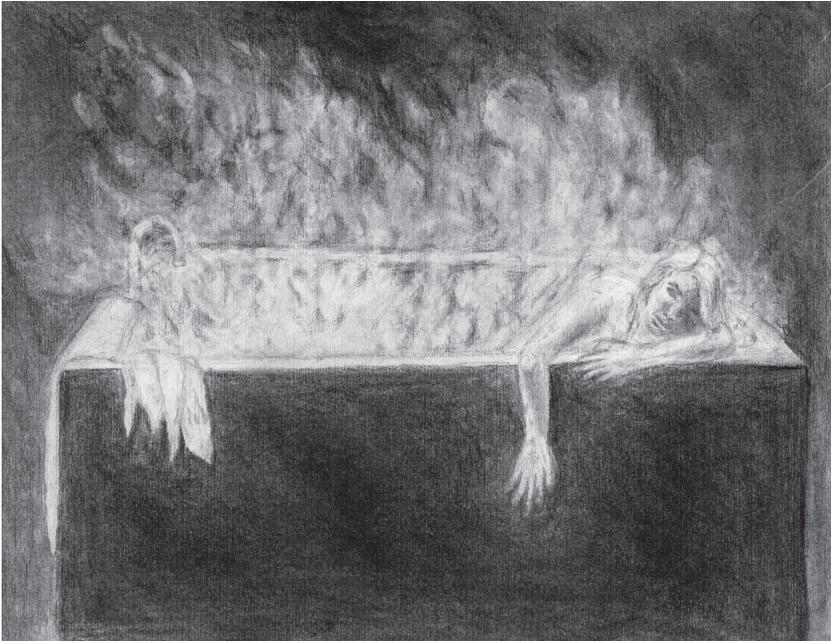


Figure 10: Bluebeard's bride takes a bath.

The Odyssey

Guest review by Sadie:

He's no hero. He was just a thrill-seeker, and everyone around him died. He was supposed to sail home, but he met a mermaid and he hung out with her for a year and his mother thought he was dead so she killed herself, and then when he left the mermaid, *she* killed *herself*. And he was *married* already! Then he met this nice god who gave him a bag of winds, like a West Wind that was supposed to blow him home, but he got curious and opened the bag to see what was in there and all the winds came out and went crazy and blew his ship onto a trickster lady's island and she turned his men into pigs, but he stayed on the island for a year anyway because he liked the food.

Then he was on his way again, but this time the lady didn't kill herself, because she was nasty. She had a lot of nasty things to do and she wasn't about to kill herself over one man leaving.

Charles Art Jerry

I have always been drawn to voodoo art. The bold colors, outlines, dots and Xs, morbid sexy chopped-up body parts merging with animal parts. Ships. Scared and scary faces. So when I received a GoFundMe request for art supplies for a boys' school in Haiti with examples of their work (acrylics on cardboard), I was excited. The guy organizing it, Charles Art Jerry, had about 60 paintings for sale. My friend M'ara and I decided to go in halves and buy all 60 paintings for \$3,000 and try to resell them. We were going to go there in person and bring supplies for the boys, too. Charles Art Jerry said forget the supplies; bring an iPhone 6 and the \$3,000 in cash. Meanwhile he's hitting up my female friends like a gigolo, waving and poking in their inbox, asking do they think he's ugly. (He's not.) In pictures, Charles Art Jerry is wearing nice clothes, a nice watch, fancy sneakers. The boys are not.

M'ara's friend in Haiti knows Charles Art Jerry. She said his paintings are real, but there is no school. She said he's always running scams, and there are tons of other artists in Haiti with excellent art we could buy instead. But I stick to things, even when it's foolish to do so. I eat Cheerios every single morning, even after I found out they use Roundup on their oats. I don't really care if someone from an

impoverished country is scamming people from a wealthy country, including me. As long as I get the art. I want that art. I've become attached to it. Not attached to keeping it, as I never keep anything, but to pursuing it, having it in my life for a minute, then sending it on its way.

So when M'ara dropped out, I renegotiated with Charles Art Jerry to buy ten paintings to resell and I'd give him \$1,000. And he'd have to mail them, because I wasn't going to Haiti without M'ara. So he says okay, but postage is \$200 and I need to send him that first along with my ID. I said, "What???" He said he would send me his ID, too. I said, "I don't want your ID! I buy and sell all over the world, and no one has asked for my ID." He replied that each of his paintings is a piece of him—he does black magic voodoo—and for him to give them to me, he needs something of me.

Naturally it was a scam. But at the same time it was the very heart of art, the transactional nature of the living thing: to steal from each other in a never-ending act of being simultaneously joyfully-sorrowfully replenished. We eat each other and form each other, through time and space and life and death, painter and painting-owner, writer and reader, dancer and watcher, musician and the freshly heartbroken driving to the ocean with the radio on.

Author Biography



Lisa Carver lives in Nevada.

She is pictured here with Mercedes Goolkasian, who is available for hire to draw you.

