

# MANTISSA

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Painting by Ricardo Celma

## EXCERPTS FROM THE BOOK OF EMBRACES

BY EDUARDO GALEANO

### THE NOBODIES

Fleas dream of buying themselves a dog, and nobodies dream of escaping poverty: that one magical day good luck will suddenly rain down on them—will rain down in buckets. But good luck doesn't rain down yesterday, today, tomorrow, or ever. Good luck doesn't even fall down in a fine drizzle, no matter how hard the nobodies summon it, even if their left hand is tickling, or if they begin the new day with their right foot, or start the new year with a change of brooms.

The nobodies: nobody's children, owners of nothing. The nobodies: the no ones, the nobodied, running like rabbits, dying through life, screwed every which way.

Who are not, but could be.

Who don't speak languages, but dialects.

Who don't have religions, but superstitions.

Who don't create art, but handicrafts.

Who don't have culture, but folklore.

Who are not human beings, but human resources.

Who do not have faces, but arms.

Who do not have names, but numbers.

Who do not appear in the history of the world, but in the police blotter of the local paper.

The nobodies, who are not worth the bullet that kills them.

### HUNGER / 1

Leaving San Salvador and heading toward Guazapa, Berta Navarro met a peasant woman displaced by the war. She was no different from any of the other women and men who had exchanged hunger for starvation. But this scraggly, ugly peasant woman was standing in the midst of desolation, her skin hanging loose on her bones and a scraggly, ugly little bird in her hand. The bird was dead and she was very slowly plucking its feathers.

### HUNGER / 2

A system of isolation: Look out for number one. Your neighbor is neither your brother nor your lover. Your neighbor is a competitor, an enemy, an obstacle to clear or an object to use. The system feeds neither the body nor the heart: many are condemned to starve for lack of bread and many more for lack of embraces.

*With Permission of the Author*

## HUNGER & THE TRANSIENT HERO;

### OR THE HUNGER OF PUBLISHING & THE PUBLISHING OF HUNGER

BY MARK AXELROD

Almost all of this is from an article I wrote in the 90s that was published in *The New Internationalist* which was the only periodical courageous enough to publish it. I have revised and added a bit, but what was true two decades ago is pretty much true today so, rather than rewrite what has already been written and still remains germane especially in the United States, I have decided to let it stand. As Vonnegut might say, "So it goes."

A quarter of a century ago, in 1992, as the sun set on the Bush Administration and the sun rose on the Clinton Administration (two sides of the same star), I had witnessed the famine in

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## INTRODUCTION

Somalia with both consternation and perplexity—at what was happening and at how I was so ineptly capable of alleviating any aspect of it. Being a mere purveyor of words, I really had no idea of what I could do to help remedy that horror or any other horror whose focus was pestilence. Pestilence and hunger. Famine, mainly. Sitting on my sofa, watching the nightly news and feeling impotent to effect change was not the principle upon which one took remedial action. Nor was sitting in my corner office working diligently on the next piece of fiction or deciding whether to use an excerpt from Derrida or Eco in an upcoming lecture. So, I began to think about what I could do to get involved since not to remedying the problem was, as Cleaver the Younger once so deftly put it, being part of the problem and being part of the problem was not being part of the solution.

But what could I do, as a mere purveyor of words, that would get me off the couch and into the universal melee that was hunger? World hunger. Finally, I came upon an idea to organize and edit a collection of fiction, poetry and essays devoted to hunger, written by writers from all over the world and published by a publisher who would donate most of the profits to a foundation whose mission it was to help remedy the burden of world hunger. I set out very systematically to discover a foundation that would be eager to participate in such a program and I found one in the Freedom From Hunger Foundation of Davis, California which, “founded in 1946, [...] promotes ‘Self-Help for a Hungry World.’” Their mission “is to create, develop, demonstrate, and disseminate, worldwide, innovative programs to eliminate chronic hunger by providing resources and information that empower the poorest families and communities to help themselves.” They appeared to be the kind of foundation with whom I could work and they had been very helpful in sending me material which I could forward to the writers.

Once I had a conduit for the “profits,” my next goal was to interest writers. Writers from around the world. Writers who had either experienced or understood the debilitating effects of hunger and who could

express that. And so I set myself the task of writing to as many writers as I could to see if they might contribute. In the course of four years I have written over 200 writers worldwide and of those 200 I have received positive responses from about 26. And they are: Martin Amis, Margaret Atwood, Christine

whatever reasons they had, I had two dozen or so of the world’s finest writers, all of whom were committed to contributing prose or poetry of some kind, and all I needed was a publisher, a publisher willing to publish these writers, a publisher whose interest in social responsibility was forthright and sincere.

of Aesop’s Fables or a redesigned cover of Tolstoy or Trollope. After all, those are all public domain.

Then I thought that, perhaps, Grove was an anomaly; perhaps the publisher who had published such distinguished humanists as Beckett and Pinget and Genet had somehow changed directions.



Painting by Alejandro Boim

Brooke-Rose, J.M. Coetzee, Maryse Condé, Ariel Dorfman, Raymond Federman, Eduardo Galeano, Allen Ginsberg, Günter Grass, Alasdair Gray, Thomas Keneally, Maxine Hong Kingston, Doris Lessing, Wole Soyinka, Ben Stoltzfus, Ronald Sukenick, Luisa Valenzuela, Gerald Vizenor, and Elie Wiesel. I also had the good fortune of interesting Madame Jehan Sadat, an enthusiastic supporter of the Freedom From Hunger Foundation, to write a foreword to the collection. And then there were others who have not committed, but who said they’d consider it. There were, of course, a lot of missing writers, noble and not Nobel Prize winners, who did not wish to participate. For whatever reason. There were a number of American writers, minority writers, who did not wish to participate either. For whatever reason. But for

I first contacted Grove Press thinking, of course, that such a distinguished press, a press of noble causes and richly-stocked writers, would be interested. And they were. For a time. Until the day came when they informed me that “the collection would not make much money.” But I didn’t think making a lot of money was the point. At least not making a lot of money for the publisher. Making some money for the foundation which, in effect, might put some bread on the ground for some child in, say, Ethiopia was the point. But I was wrong. Profitability was the point. How naive. And in my naïveté I marveled at the loss of the pro bono spirit of publishing. At least semi-pro bono. Not in that world. No “kinder, gentler” humanists there. No, what I discovered were bottom-line guys and dolls whose quest for the absolute seemed to be hedged in a “new” collection

From new directions to newer directions. Perhaps others, when they discovered such a fine collection of writers and writing, would be as enthusiastic about the possibility as I was. Perhaps Noonday would be interested. After all, they published and still published Hamsun’s *Hunger* and, after all, it documents the horror of hunger—albeit in an artistic way. But perhaps that kind of hunger is easier to publish. After all, it happened over a hundred years ago, and late nineteenth-century Norwegian hunger isn’t fin de siècle American hunger or Latin American hunger or Rwandan hunger, and Hamsun won a Nobel Prize and... well, you get the idea. In short, their answer was “this would not be suitable for our list” and, of course, “list suitability” is of paramount importance in the publishing world.

I've continued to scour the Manhattan pavements for a publisher who might be interested in this collection, but the results have been fruitless. Without naming names, just about every major publisher has repeated the same phrase to me: "it won't turn a profit." Curious, that in an industry which thrives on the "stripped cover" and the junk book, no one would be interested in supporting an issue like hunger simply because it might not make "big bucks." It reminds me of the admonition I once received from a Hollywood producer that I shouldn't write any film script which had to do with American Indians since, well, Indians don't sell at the box office. And, apparently, hunger doesn't sell in the bookstores or on college campuses.

One of the latest publishers (in a series of publishers who sit behind four walls and several windows) told me she was reluctant to publish an anthology with only half of the collection in hand. That is to say, she seemed concerned that the writers who were writing original works could not fulfill the task. I asked her if she were worried that writers like Martin Amis or Ariel Dorfman or Wilson Harris weren't up to the task of writing a piece on hunger. She replied that she was concerned they couldn't do a very good job writing "on assignment." Hunger? An assignment? "You mean you think none of these writers has ever thought about that issue?" I asked. She hedged. And hedged again. And the hedging was merely another way of saying, "we won't make any money." Except she didn't have the courage to say that. It's not politically correct to decline to publish an anthology on hunger based on content alone, one must have an excuse. Hers was to cast doubt upon the ability of the writers to produce a work of substance, rather than consign her decision to the god of profitability.

To say I have been disappointed by the New York publishing "community" is to say the very least. Perhaps the industry "reflects" the tenor of the times, the Gingrich tenor, the balanced-budget-at-all-costs tenor, the disdain for social responsibility tenor, the tenor of the times. Perhaps it's always been that way. I'm reminded of the quote from Thomas Whiteside's 1980

book *The Blockbuster Complex: Conglomerates, Show Business and Book Publishing* that "Given the preoccupation of publishers and editors with acquiring and promoting best-sellers, and the evident decline in editorial standards, the question of how authors whose works have more literary than commercial promise may fare today is a crucial one for the industry. From what I have been able to observe, apprehension is widespread—among authors, among many agents, among some editors, and even among some heads of conglomerate-owned publishing houses—that in the blockbuster era the artistic worth of many individual authors is being sighted or ignored, and their minimum means of livelihood rendered more precarious than ever" (Whiteside 103). One may, by extension, include books of purpose as well.

Clearly, some may recognize my attempt to get this anthology published as being a fruitless one done in a meager effort to try to rectify the heretofore unrectifiable notion that in a free-market, Friedmanian economy "some must eat and some must starve, depending on the vouchers one has," but I felt certain that somewhere on the streets of Manhattan, somewhere, someone, someone other than someone who by Grand Central Station sits down to weep, would redefine the issue of the bottom line in terms of the human condition rather than capital gains. Needless to say, the relationship between profit and prophet goes beyond the homonym of spelling and I continue to search impatiently for an editor who can recognize the spirit of humanity. So far there is little fruit either in America or England. This is where the revised portion comes in.

When all else fails, publish yourself. So, I decided to devote this 3rd edition of *MANTISSA* to "hunger" in several of its iterations. I'm including stories written by those people who so graciously offered to submit a quarter of a century ago and those who only recently submitted. I'm also devoting this issue to the first person who agreed to submit something; namely, the late Eduardo Galeano... and in honor of his first contribution, I'm also including a painting of him by the Argentine painter, Ricardo Celma.

The endpiece is a painting by the Chilean painter, Camilo Ambrosio. In both cases, I am extremely grateful to them for allowing me to reproduce their pieces.

Dismissed by the disingenuousness of the New York publishing establishment and in a pique of rejection, I composed an essay, this essay, as a way of expressing my frustration with the Mad Ave. moguls. I said to myself, send this essay out to magazines in order to expose the publishing industry's callousness to things that matter. No luck. *The Nation* ignored me; as did *Harper's* and *The Atlantic*; only *Esquire* had the decency to write me their sympathy. Undaunted, I made a tape of the essay and sent it to National Public Radio; certain beyond any reasonable uncertainty that they, of all media, would eagerly broadcast it. After all, how many essays on "what it was like to go to my high school reunion" could they play? But their response was equal to the rest. In ways it was even more puerile, since they said it would be better as "a written essay" than one made for radio.

So, after 25 years of getting nowhere in an attempt to publish the literature of hunger and not the hunger of literature, I have my own platform to do so.



## A MODEST PROPOSAL

BY JONATHAN SWIFT

It is a melancholy object to those who walk through this great town or travel in the country, when they see the streets, the roads, and cabin doors, crowded with beggars of the female sex, followed by three, four, or six children, all in rags and importuning every passenger for an alms. These mothers, instead of being able to work for their honest livelihood, are forced to employ all their time in strolling to beg sustenance for their helpless infants: who as they grow up either turn thieves for want of work, or leave their dear native country to fight for the Pretender in Spain, or sell themselves to the Barbadoes.

I think it is agreed by all parties that this prodigious number of children in the arms, or on the backs, or at the heels of their mothers, and frequently of their fathers, is in the present deplorable state of the kingdom a very great additional grievance; and, therefore, whoever could find out a fair, cheap, and easy method of making these children sound, useful members of the commonwealth, would deserve so well of the public as to have his statue set up for a preserver of the nation.

But my intention is very far from being confined to provide only for the children of professed beggars; it is of a much greater extent, and shall take in the whole number of infants at a certain age who are born of parents in effect as little able to support them as those who demand our charity in the streets.

As to my own part, having turned my thoughts for many years upon this important subject, and maturely weighed the several schemes of other projectors, I have always found them grossly mistaken in the computation. It is true, a child just dropped from its dam may be supported by her milk for a solar year, with little other nourishment; at most not above the value of two shillings, which the mother may certainly get, or the value in scraps, by her lawful occupation of begging; and it is exactly at one year old that I propose to provide for them in such a manner as instead of being a charge upon their parents or the parish, or wanting food and raiment for the rest of their lives, they shall on the contrary contribute to the feeding, and partly to the clothing, of many thousands.

There is likewise another great advantage in my scheme, that it will prevent those voluntary abortions, and that horrid practice of women murdering their bastard children, alas! too frequent among us! sacrificing the poor innocent babes I doubt more to avoid the expense than the shame, which would move tears and pity in the most savage and inhuman breast.

The number of souls in this kingdom being usually reckoned one million and a half, of these I calculate there may be about two hundred thousand couple whose wives are breeders; from which



number I subtract thirty thousand couples who are able to maintain their own children, although I apprehend there cannot be so many, under the present distresses of the kingdom; but this being granted, there will remain an hundred and seventy thousand breeders. I again subtract fifty thousand for those women who miscarry, or whose children die by accident or disease within the year. There only remains one hundred and twenty thousand children of poor parents annually born. The question therefore is, how this number shall be reared and provided for, which, as I have already said, under the present situation of affairs, is utterly impossible by all the methods hitherto proposed. For we can neither employ them in handicraft or agriculture; we neither build houses (I mean in the country)

nor cultivate land: they can very seldom pick up a livelihood by stealing, till they arrive at six years old, except where they are of towardly parts, although I confess they learn the rudiments much earlier, during which time, they can however be properly looked upon only as probationers, as I have been informed by a principal gentleman in the county of Cavan, who protested to me that he never knew above one or two instances under the age of six, even in a part of the kingdom so renowned for the quickest proficiency in that art.

I am assured by our merchants, that a boy or a girl before twelve years old is no salable commodity; and even when they come to this age they will not yield above three pounds, or three pounds and half-a-crown at most on the exchange; which cannot turn to account either to the parents or kingdom, the charge of nutriment and rags having been at least four times that value.

I shall now therefore humbly propose my own thoughts, which I hope will not be liable to the least objection.

I have been assured by a very knowing American of my acquaintance in London, that a young healthy child well nursed is at a year old a most delicious, nourishing, and wholesome food, whether stewed, roasted,

baked, or boiled; and I make no doubt that it will equally serve in a fricassee or a ragout.

I do therefore humbly offer it to public consideration that of the hundred and twenty thousand children already computed, twenty thousand may be reserved for breed, whereof only one-fourth part to be males; which is more than we allow to sheep, black cattle or swine; and my reason is, that these children are seldom the fruits of marriage, a circumstance not much regarded by our savages, therefore one male will be sufficient to serve four females. That the remaining hundred thousand may, at a year old, be offered in the sale to the persons of quality and fortune through the kingdom; always advising the mother to let them suck plentifully in the last month, so as to render them plump and fat for a good table. A child will make two dishes at an entertainment for friends; and when the family dines alone, the fore or hind quarter will make a reasonable dish, and seasoned with a little pepper or salt will be very good boiled on the fourth day, especially in winter.

I have reckoned upon a medium that a child just born will weigh 12 pounds, and in a solar year, if tolerably nursed, increaseth to 28 pounds.

I grant this food will be somewhat dear, and therefore very proper for landlords, who, as they have already devoured most of the parents, seem to have the best title to the children.

Infant's flesh will be in season throughout the year, but more plentiful in March, and a little before and after; for we are told by a grave author, an eminent French physician, that fish being a prolific diet, there are more children born in Roman Catholic countries about nine months after Lent than at any other season; therefore, reckoning a year after Lent, the markets will be more glutted than usual, because the number of popish infants is at least three to one in this kingdom: and therefore it will have one other collateral advantage, by lessening the number of papists among us.

I have already computed the charge of nursing a beggar's child (in which list I reckon all cottagers, laborers, and four-fifths of the farmers) to be about two shillings per annum, rags included; and I believe no gentleman would repine to give ten shillings for the carcass of a good fat child, which, as I have said, will make four dishes of

excellent nutritive meat, when he hath only some particular friend or his own family to dine with him. Thus the squire will learn to be a good landlord, and grow popular among his tenants; the mother will have eight shillings net profit, and be fit for work till she produces another child.

Those who are more thrifty (as I must confess the times require) may flay the carcass; the skin of which artificially dressed will make admirable gloves for ladies, and summer boots for fine gentlemen.

As to our city of Dublin, shambles may be appointed for this purpose in the most convenient parts of it, and butchers we may be assured will not be wanting; although I rather recommend buying the children alive, and dressing them hot from the knife, as we do roasting pigs.

A very worthy person, a true lover of his country, and whose virtues I highly esteem, was lately pleased in discoursing on this matter to offer a refinement upon my scheme. He said that many gentlemen of this kingdom, having of late destroyed their deer, he conceived that the want of venison might be well supplied by the bodies of young lads and maidens, not exceeding fourteen years of age nor under twelve; so great a number of both sexes in every country being now ready to starve for want of work and service; and these to be disposed of by their parents, if alive, or otherwise by their nearest relations. But with due deference to so excellent a friend and so deserving a patriot, I cannot be altogether in his sentiments; for as to the males, my American acquaintance assured me, from frequent experience, that their flesh was generally tough and lean, like that of our schoolboys by continual exercise, and their taste disagreeable; and to fatten them would not answer the charge. Then as to the females, it would, I think, with humble submission be a loss to the public, because they soon would become breeders themselves; and besides, it is not improbable that some scrupulous people might be apt to censure such a practice (although indeed very unjustly), as a little bordering upon cruelty; which, I confess, hath always been with me the strongest objection against any project, however so well intended.

But in order to justify my friend, he confessed that this expedient was put into his head by the famous Psalmanazar, a native of the island Formosa, who came from thence to London

above twenty years ago, and in conversation told my friend, that in his country when any young person happened to be put to death, the executioner sold the carcass to persons of quality as a prime dainty; and that in his time the body of a plump girl of fifteen, who was crucified for an attempt to poison the emperor, was sold to his imperial majesty's prime minister of state, and other great mandarins of the court, in joints from the gibbet, at four hundred crowns. Neither indeed can I deny, that if the same use were made of several plump young girls in this town, who without one single groat to their fortunes cannot stir abroad without a chair, and appear at playhouse and assemblies in foreign fineries which they never will pay for, the kingdom would not be the worse.

Some persons of a desponding spirit are in great concern about that vast number of poor people, who are aged, diseased, or maimed, and I have been desired to employ my thoughts what course may be taken to ease the nation of so grievous an encumbrance. But I am not in the least pain upon that matter, because it is very well known that they are every day dying and rotting by cold and famine, and filth and vermin, as fast as can be reasonably expected. And as to the young laborers, they are now in as hopeful a condition; they cannot get work, and consequently pine away for want of nourishment, to a degree that if at any time they are accidentally hired to common labor, they have not strength to perform it; and thus the country and themselves are happily delivered from the evils to come.



## BREAD

BY MARGARET ATWOOD

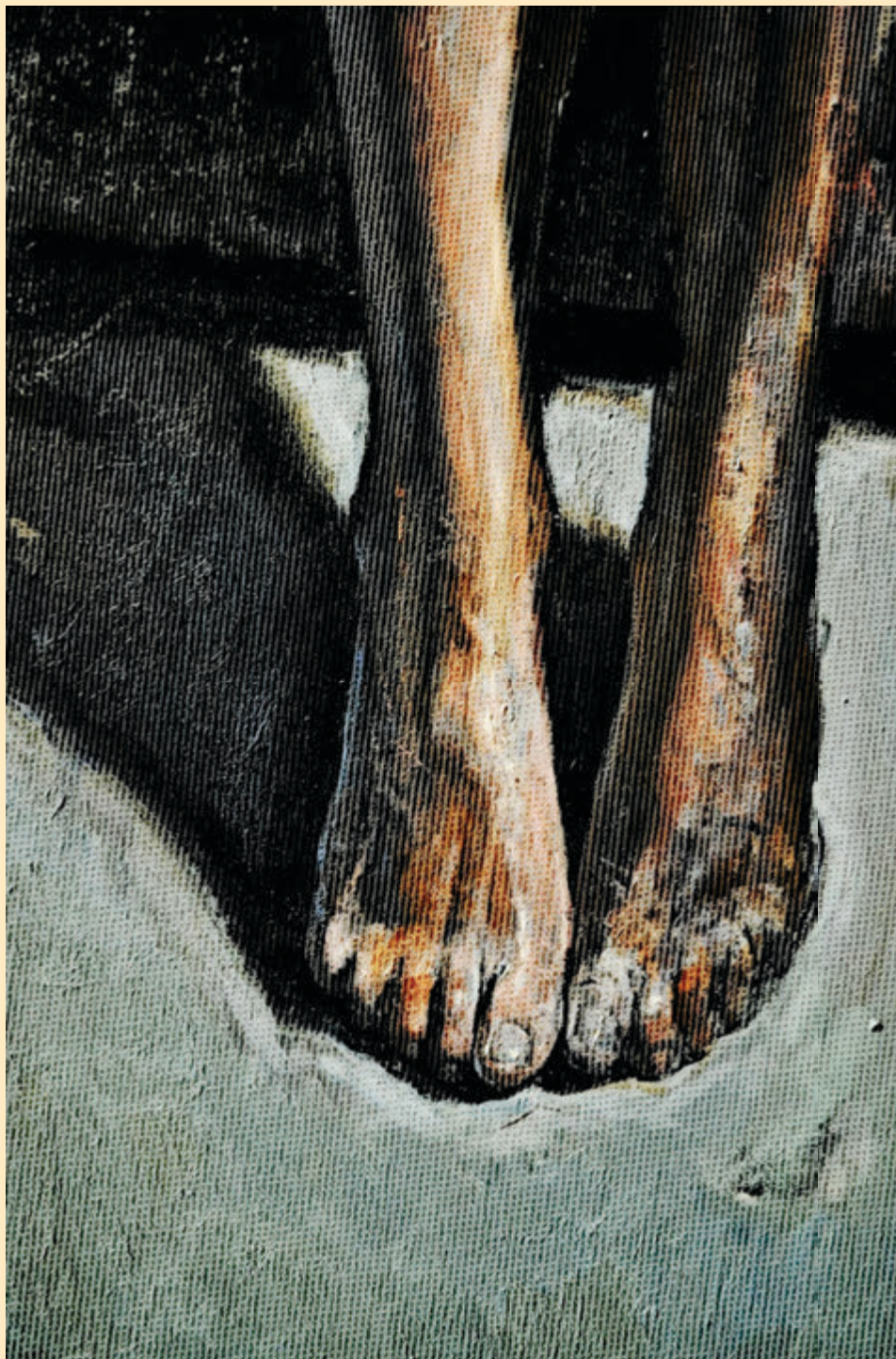
First published in *Murder in the Dark*

Imagine a piece of bread. You don't have to imagine it, it's right here in the kitchen, on the bread board, in its plastic bag, lying beside the bread knife. The bread knife is an old one you picked up at an auction; it has the word BREAD carved into the wooden handle. You open the bag, pull back the wrapper, cut yourself a slice. You put butter on it, then peanut butter, then honey, and you fold it over. Some of the honey runs out onto your fingers and you lick it off. It takes you about a minute to eat the bread. This bread happens to be brown, but there is also white bread, in the refrigerator, and a heel of rye you got last week, round as a full stomach, then, now going mouldy. Occasionally you make bread. You think of it as something relaxing to do with your hands.

Imagine a famine. Now imagine a piece of bread. Both of these things are real but you happen to be in the same room with only one of them. Put yourself into a different room, that's what the mind is for. You are now lying on a thin mattress in a hot room. The walls are made of dried earth and your sister, who is younger than you are, is in the room with you. She is starving, her belly is bloated, flies land on her eyes; you brush them off with your hand. You have a cloth too, filthy but damp, and you press it to her lips and forehead. The piece of bread is the bread you've been saving, for days it seems. You are as hungry as she is, but not yet as weak. How long does this take? When will someone come with more bread? You think of going out to see if you might find something that could be eaten, but outside the streets are infested with scavengers and the stink of corpses is everywhere.

Should you share the bread or give the whole piece to your sister? Should you eat the piece of bread yourself? After all, you have a better chance of living, you're stronger. How long does it take to decide?

Imagine a prison. There is something you know that you have not yet told. Those in control of the prison know that you know. So do those not in control. If you



Painting by Alejandro Boim

tell, thirty or forty or a hundred of your friends, your comrades, will be caught and will die. If you refuse to tell, tonight will be like last night. They always choose the night. You don't think about the night however, but about the piece of bread they offered you. How long does it take? The piece of bread was brown and fresh and reminded you of sunlight falling across a wooden floor. It reminded you of a bowl, a yellow bowl that was once in your home. It held apples and pears; it stood on a table you can also remember. It's not the hunger or the pain that is killing you but the absence of the yellow bowl. If you could only hold the bowl in your hands, right here, you could withstand anything, you tell yourself. The bread they offered you is subversive, it's treacherous, it does not mean life.

There were once two sisters. One was rich and had no children, the other had five children and was a widow, so poor that she no

that you can see the bread, you can even smell it, it smells like yeast, and it looks solid enough, solid as your own arm. But can you trust it? Can you eat it? You don't want to know, imagine that.

*With Permission of the Author*



longer had any food left. She went to her sister and asked her for a mouthful of bread. 'My children are dying,' she said. The rich sister said, 'I do not have enough for myself,' and drove her away from the door. Then the husband of the rich sister came home and wanted to cut himself a piece of bread; but when he made the first cut, out flowed red blood.

Everyone knew what that meant.

This is a traditional German fairy-tale.

The loaf of bread I have conjured for you floats about a foot above your kitchen table. The table is normal, there are no trap doors in it. A blue tea towel floats beneath the bread, and there are no strings attaching the cloth to the bread or the bread to the ceiling or the table to the cloth, you've proved it by passing your hand above and below. You didn't touch the bread though. What stopped you? You don't want to know whether the bread is real or whether it's just a hallucination I've somehow duped you into seeing. There's no doubt

CLARITY

BY IAN PRICHARD

“Poor Tom,” she said, and hung up. For more years than he cared to count, it’d been “Poor Tom,” then emptiness.

Tom could quite literally do the math, could see as they spoke the wireless connection between them, clear as kite string between cans. And when it was over—those two words were a visceral severance. Shears through string. Gristle yielding under the knife.

“Wait,” he’d choke into the space between his name and the silence. “Wait.”

Then he’d come back to himself, at a bar examining freshly scuffed knuckles, or in a convenience store buying cigarettes he’d never smoke, or bent double in the street sucking air after what his lungs told him was a long, hard run.

Tonight, though, staring at the phone in his hand, “Call Ended” fading to black, such desperations barely registered. He’d been calm for several weeks now, returned almost to a pre-Kira state. What he could remember of such a

thing, anyway. Calling her had been a test, a last-minute gauge to see what power she still held over him. And instead of fleeing, instead of fending off panic and cascading into frenzy, here he was, wondering almost idly how long that kite string was today. Was she in Istanbul? Buenos Aires? Across town?

For many years, Tom wished he’d never met Kira. It never stopped him from calling, but he used to daydream about her falling off cliffs or stepping in front of a bus. Something shattering and final.

He was clear of all that now, though, thanks to Jonah. And he slid his phone back into his pocket and jogged back across the street to join them.



“I’ll let you if you pay me,” she’d said back then, the words nearly drowned out by the vein-flooding rush. Kira thought at first that the feeling was shame. It should have been, from what she knew then of the world and morality. But in its wake, with Tom pulling twenties from his wallet, with

lab notes crinkling beneath them and textbooks digging into her back, Kira knew the feeling was something else entirely. Victory was too strong a word, but agency, certainly, and pride, and whatever else you called the opposite of shame. A kind of astonished elation, like walking through the curtain of a waterfall to find not a dimly lit overhang, but what you always thought life should be, what existence, what existing should feel like.

The last time she’d seen him, the sun hadn’t made it up over the row houses across the street. She was up, working, and annoyed.

“I don’t like showing up like this,” he said, an ataxic gesture indicating all the different thises that he meant, his eyes bloodshot and red-rimmed.

“I know,” Kira said. “But you can’t come in.”

“But I have it.” Crumpled bills lay cradled in his open, shaky palm, the smell of stale bed linen and the need for sun rising off him. “Poor Tom,” she said. “Look what it’s done to you.”

For a moment Kira wondered if she were about to see a man liquefy, or spontaneously combust—some Victorian nightmare come to life. But he pulled himself together and walked down the stairs. When he was beyond the gate, Kira hollered after him, “You can still call.”



For generations, the blocks around CJ’s had been a family neighborhood, its composition a microcosm of the city at large. It was decrepit now, and half-vacant, and the six-figurines were pouring in. Most of them loved living in the overpriced squalor, with coffeehouses and art spaces sprouting around them—Tom was there for the others, those at the end of the bar, back to the TV, gaze fixed firmly on their receding potential. If a mark mentioned the word “unfair,” or so much as hinted at the concept, Tom would nod at Jonah, who would approach, buy a round, and listen.

All Jonah required was faith—willingness in the absence of explanations, as he had it. There was no dogma, and little in the way of core philosophy. Jonah simply encouraged them to

express their true selves. He was unconcerned as to what form these expressions took, suggesting only that their intensity increase. Nine in ten of the men Tom brought to him never showed up a third time, but those that stayed kept telling Jonah things. Torments they’d suffered as children. Abuses they’d doled out since. Thought dreams and impulses they’d planned to take to their graves.

Soon, the weight of their collective debt was palpable, the strain of it showing in Jonah’s face. Tom longed to shoulder some of the burden—not for the glory, or the secrets, but to ease his keeper’s pain. Jonah was candid with him, and the method was plain, but the endgame had been beyond Tom’s ken.

“Prepare your heart to be spontaneous,” Jonah had told him, once he started speaking in aphorisms about closure and the fullness of circles, and dragging his boning knife across the whetstone, Tom finally knew what he meant.



To say Kira sold sex would be to grossly oversimplify what it was she did. Unlike college, she discovered shortly after leaving it, the real world was a place where if you call someone stupid, he’ll give you money. This was true at all levels, and what Kira specialized in was finding men who believed themselves impervious to bullshit, and shoveling it down their throats.

Like any good consultant, she convinced people that she alone held the key to a problem they weren’t aware they had. She simplified game theory to an elevator pitch McLaren-driving assholes could pretend they understood, and by applying to financial markets certain cosmological principles like the ubiquity and perpetual expansion of dark energy, she made a name for herself in ever-smaller circles on ever-higher floors of ever-taller buildings.

She required cash, up front, and billed the sex in seven-minute increments as a change order under “executive management.” It gave her timid clients the board-



Painting by Alejandro Boim





room confidence they needed, and leeches her unrulier ones of just enough of their volatility to keep them toeing their investors' line.

There was a third type, the ones *Forbes*, etcetera, considered pillars of the international economy—and, increasingly, that *Forbes*, etcetera, didn't mention at all. What she did with these men was rearrange them, morally, motivationally, permanently. They have more in common with every other male on the planet than either group would like to admit, but one trait unique to them was that at a certain stage in their development they were deprived of something they wanted very badly, and they had built their lives around the determination to never experience the feeling again. Kira wasn't so fragile that she could commiserate, but she recognized the emotional mechanism, and she manipulated that fear in ways that the men who paid her to do so invariably, afterwards, wished they hadn't. Most of them simply disappeared from her life when she told them the bill they'd just paid would be their last. The more vindictive among them—a trait she cultivated—exacted their revenge not on her, but on the colleagues or rivals they referred her to.

These days, Kira's practice comprised almost solely men from this third group, and it was to one of them that she was talking an hour after hanging up on Tom.

"No, you listen to me," she said into the phone, to a man in Dubai. She was on the street smoking a cigarette. "That's actually why you pay me. I'm terribly sorry you thought I was going to be there today, but since I never told you I was, I'm actually not sorry."

Dubai started talking again, whining really, but Kira's attention drifted. More than a mile off the freeway, it was quiet here in the middle of the night, and while she was sure that what she was hearing was the tramp of heavy-soled boots, there was a moment of disbelief, of eerie disconnect before she realized the boots were not some aural illusion but actually treading her street. She turned towards the sound and saw seven men in quasi-military garb marching, not in formation, but in gaits coordinated enough that their footfalls rang together. They carried knives—kitchen knives and cleavers, from what Kira could tell, and one that looked like a small sword.

She was close enough to see their faces, or would have been, had they not been shrouded in balaclavas. There was some fear hanging around somewhere, in her twitchy quads and deep breaths, but mostly it was curiosity she felt, watching them cross over her street on their way up the main road.



Tom didn't recognize Kira, either, though he did see her. She was backlit by a street lamp, and the mask, hanging down over his eyebrows, made the distance fuzzy. But even in broad daylight he wouldn't have taken her in right away. He had no reason to expect her, for one, and two, for the first time in twenty years, she wasn't on his mind.

His mind was on a building three blocks ahead. Storefronts below, apartments above, a string of girls out front. He'd never thought of himself as someone who had anything against prostitutes. Lust was an urge that required satisfaction, and if the notions of romantic love peddled by Disney movies and the American popular song were a lie—which Tom knew them to be—at least there was a modicum of honesty about the world's oldest profession.

Neither, however, had he ever quite come to terms with the fact that what he'd done with Kira counted as the same thing. He'd chalked their transactions up to a quirk of their friendship, a kind of quid-pro-quo generosity he could afford. On some level, buried under strata of what he

assumed psychologists would call denial, Tom knew it was the same, but why bring it up from down there, to cheapen his devotion? So his conception of Kira existed in suspension, untethered from reality or principles. The way he longed for her, and the hope with which he staunches his hemorrhaging pain—these too existed in a blind spot, simultaneously purposeful and beyond any semblance of will.

"Have you ever heard an IV drug user describe his addiction?" Jonah had asked when Tom first explained it.

And so Tom had come up with tonight's errand as an intervention, a way to break the cycle. He diagrammed the location, chose the night, lined up the clothes, told the men to bring their knives. He didn't know what they'd do once they got there—Jonah had taught them to plan well but leave the act itself to inspiration—but they all knew it was "next-level shit," as one of the men put it, excitedly, when they were only a few blocks away.



When the first screams came—shrieks of panic from the women and the beastly roar of male aggression—Kira took a few strides in their direction. Then a couple of shots popped off, loud as hell but small caliber, probably something tiny like hers, like what she was reaching for, fumbling for in her purse, not finding. She stopped. Sorry, girls, she thought, you're on your own.

Kids rushed out of a pizza joint, shouting, pointing at the uniformed men retreating, full speed, the knives they still gripped catching the intermittent lights of the night street. Kira counted six. In their wake, girls who'd slipped their heels were in hot, barefoot pursuit.

Then a groan of agony came from the center of violence. Then another, this one sounding more like a word. Then the word, clearly, repeated three times, each louder than the one before. "No." The man had to be making an effort for his voice to carry so well. "Please. Look. I. You," the voice said. "I won't." Kira couldn't place it, but for a second it registered as familiar. Then whoever was

standing over whoever's voice it was squeezed the trigger again, and the street went silent and still.

Standing in the aftermath, as the kids came back to life and apartment windows slid up and everyone started dialing 9-1-1, Kira thought of the police, of the time they'd take, the money she'd be out. "Nothing that concerns us," she said to Dubai when he asked what was happening. She turned against the stream of people rushing to meet the sirens, and walked her client through the presentation he was making in forty minutes.



## DRAGON OF AIR

BY JOHN DIAMOND-NIGH

*When Loie Fuller's Chinese dancers enwound  
A shining web, a floating ribbon of cloth  
It seemed that a dragon of air  
Had fallen among dancers, had whirled them around  
Or hurried them on its own furious path.*

Elsewhere Yeats asks, in what is perhaps his most frequently quoted line: *Who can tell the dancer from the dance?* An old friend, facing the dissolution of his marriage, wrote those lines at the bottom of a card. I think he meant to ask, who can tell the

overgrown—I see these guys on the lam, fugitives, bums, making their way to shadowy pseudonymities somewhere toward the railroad's end. If they get that far. Many don't even suspect I'm here. They look up and see a kid's playhouse, though pretty high and substantial for a kid. It's not much to look at from outside. And who lives in a treehouse? Birds. The stone goes back in his mouth. Not once does he look up. So I never see his face. But I like him. Tell me why? He's taking my axe. But that stone is poignant. He gnaws it like an intransigent rind. He's hungry. That stone is all that he has for food. When that stone is done, he slides it into his pocket and takes out another.

man. Another stone goes into his mouth. He wavers, hand propped against the tree, head down. He is very weak. And likely quite ill.

The boy—be frank, *I was the boy*—in his minute *château en Espagne*, was writing a letter. Such is our idealism at 16 or so. To the editor of his town paper at just that point when the tramp appeared. *All I hear anymore is 'fraud'. Our world is so profusely avaricious that it takes whole galaxies of bureaucrats to protect me. Above those Dantean circles of bureaucrats, the few men and women who own the world protect me from even greater fraud. Fraud from Haiti, from Russia, employing, of course, a speckled and camouflaged fraudulence of*

axe down. As weapons go, the hatchet of course is more portable. Missing one hand, what use is an axe? I bought that hatchet, believe it or not, in Damascus. He takes the stone from his mouth and gnaws on a new one.

I have a dozen hard-boiled eggs. Some bread, some cheese and an apple. Into the pail they go. I add a bottle of water. Then down through a small trap door I lower the pail. Hand over hand, I let out the rope. It's how I bring my firewood up, my food, all that in my bird-sung, Thoreauvian domesticity I need. I don't need much. That pail, in fact, came from my mother's barn, once used by pioneers. There's a risk that he'll cut or untie her delicate relic and take that too. In the pail I've also placed a knife. My best hunting knife. A diminutive Excalibur. A knife, I believe, that makes you inviolable. I have so few possessions; those I have are laden with magic and stories.

Just as he reaches into the pail for an egg, we both hear a crash, far off, then a steely rustle nearby. He grabs the knife and a couple more eggs and he's gone. Manifest even to me are his terror, his weakness. He wobbles, he stumbles but somehow has vanished. *Quick, climb up.* He still might have time. He does look up. I see his eyes, kind yet charred almost wholly black by the miseries of a bad relentless luck. He shrieks but it's soft, a warble almost, a sound his pursuers will take for a bird, as he's hurried away on some furious path.

*It seemed like a dragon of air . . .*



mistakes of life from life itself? Or, as Auden, and later James Hillman would point out, who *really* knows what powers control our lives? What forces hurry us off on their own furious paths?

Under the tree where I live an old man is stealing my axe. He sorts through a small mound of metallic debris under its curly camouflage of vines. From his mouth he draws a wet stone. He's searching for what? A weapon. One of his hands is missing. The forearm wilts down to little more than a blunt twig. I see this sometimes. Wracked animals. Deer, dogs, men. My tree being close to the disused Buffalo-Hamilton line—a line now shorn of its rails and ties and thickly

He could be a hunter, his gun nearby, propped against a tree. There are many of those in the woods. Or a brother-in-law of the Maysersmiths, who live in a tidy farmhouse down the road with lamb's ears and daffodils and gentle English ethics. Maybe he's from Iowa. Breaking himself from tobacco by chewing a stone. Maybe he's Baudelaire, here to inspect my opera. My opera takes place in Paris. It begins at Baudelaire's *Le Club des Haschichins* on Isle St. Louis, where a doctor serves jellied hashish on a silver plate. That fantasy is relentless: even when I see a wolf (*especially* when I see a wolf) I think it's Baudelaire. I think of Baudelaire now when I see this tragic, poignant, hungry

*their own. They stalk and undo my enemies. Like the reach and grace of God used to do, they protect me from evil, yet all the while are themselves the greatest evil of all.* I look at this now—*men and women who own the world*—and think how out-of-step I was, how arcane, the dandy *En Espagne* of an old, aesthetic morality. Emulating Baudelaire up to his trivial end.

I cap my Pelikan pen and watch as the man at the foot of my tree rubs a thumb along the edge of my axe. It's sharp. I sharpened it this morning. To be sure, it would offer negligible defense against the rifles of a cop, or prison foe or bounty hunter, but some protection. He picks up my hatchet and feels that as well. He sets the



C'MON PIGS  
OF WESTERN  
CIVILIZATION EAT  
MORE GREASE

BY ALLEN GINSBERG

Eat Eat more marbled Sirloin more  
Pork'n gravy!

Lard up the dressing, fry chicken  
in boiling oil

Carry it dribbling to gray climes,  
snowed with salt,

Little lambs covered with mint  
roast in racks surrounded  
by roast potatoes wet with  
buttersauce,

Buttered veal medallions in  
creamy saliva, buttered  
beef, by glistening  
mountains of french fries

Stroganoffs in white hot sour  
cream, chops soaked in  
olive oil, surrounded by  
olives, salty feta cheese,  
followed by Roquefort &  
Bleu & Stilton thirsty

for wine, beer Cocacola Fanta  
Champagne Pepsi retsina  
arak whiskey vodka

Agh! Watch out heart attack,  
pop more angina pills

order a plate of Bratwurst, fried  
frankfurters, couple  
billion Wimpys',  
MacDonald burgers  
to the moon & burp!

Salt on those fries! Boil onions &  
breaded mushrooms  
even zucchini in deep  
hot Crisco pans

Turkeys die only once, look nice  
next to tall white glasses  
sugarmilk & icecream  
vanilla balls

Strawberry for sweeter color  
milkshakes with hot dogs

Forget greenbeans, everyday a  
few carrots, a mini big  
spoonful of salty rice'll  
do, make the plate pretty;

throw in some vinegar pickles,  
briny sauerkraut check  
yr. cholesterol, swallow  
a pill

and order a sugar Cream donut,  
pack 2 under the size  
44 belt



Pass out in the vomitorium come  
back cough up strands of  
sandwich still chewing  
pastrami at Katz's  
delicatessen

Back to central Europe & gobble  
Kielbasa in Łódź

swallow salami in Munich with  
beer, Liverwurst on  
pumpernickel in Berlin,  
greasy cheese in a 3 star  
Hotel near Syntagma,  
on white bread  
thick-buttered

Set an example for developing  
nations, salt, sugar,  
animal fat, coffee tobacco  
Schnapps

Drop dead faster! make room for  
Chinese guestworkers  
with alien soybean  
curds green cabbage & rice!

Africans Latins with rice beans &  
calabash can stay thin  
& crowd in apartments  
for working class  
foodfreaks—

Not like western cuisine rich in  
protein cancer heart attack  
hypertension sweat bloated  
liver & spleen megaly

Diabetes & stroke—monuments  
to carnivorous  
civilizations

presently murdering Belfast  
Bosnia Cypress Ngorno  
Karabach Georgia

mailing love letter bombs in  
Vienna or setting houses  
afire in East Germany  
—have another coffee,  
here's a cigar.

And this is a plate of black forest  
chocolate cake, you  
deserve it.

*Athens, 19 December 1993  
With Permission of the Author*



## EXCERPTS

## HUNGER

BY KNUT HAMSN

It was three o'clock. Hunger began to assail me downright in earnest. I was faint, and now and again I had to retch furtively. I swung round by the Dampkøkken, read the bill of fare, and shrugged my shoulders in a way to attract attention, as if corned beef or salt port was not meet food for me. After that I went towards the railway station.

A singular sense of confusion suddenly darted through my head. I stumbled on, determined not to heed it; but I grew worse and worse, and was forced at last to sit down on a step. My whole being underwent a change, as if something had slid aside in my inner self, or as if a curtain or tissue of my brain was rent in two.

I was not unconscious; I felt that my ear was gathering a little, and, as an acquaintance passed by, I recognized him at once and got up and bowed.

I could not get my request over my lips. This man's friendliness seemed to me beyond bounds, and I ought to know how to appreciate it. Rather die of hunger! I went. Not even when I was outside the door, and felt once more the pangs of hunger, did I repent having left the office without having asked for that shilling. I took the other shaving out of my pocket and stuck it into my mouth. It helped. Why hadn't I done so before? "You ought to be ashamed of yourself," I said aloud. "Could it really have entered your head to ask the man for a shilling and put him to inconvenience again?"

and I got downright angry with myself for the effrontery of which I had almost been guilty. "That is, by God! the shabbiest thing I ever heard," said I, "to rush at a man and nearly tear the eyes out of his head just because you happen to need a shilling, you miserable dog! So--o, march! quicker! quicker! you big thumping lout; I'll teach you." I commenced to run to punish myself, left one street after the other behind me at a bound, goaded myself on with suppressed cries, and shrieked dumbly and furiously at myself whenever I was about to halt. Thus I arrived a long way up Pyle Street, when at last I stood still, almost ready to cry with vexation at not being able to run any farther. I was trembling over my whole body, and I flung myself down on a step. "No; stop!" I said, and, in order to torture myself rightly, I arose again, and forced myself to keep standing. I jeered at myself and hugged myself with pleasure at the spectacle of my own exhaustion. At length, after the lapse of a few moments, I gave myself, with a nod, permission to be seated, though, even then, I chose the most uncomfortable place on the steps.

DOWN AND OUT IN  
PARIS AND LONDON

BY GEORGE ORWELL

These three weeks were squalid and uncomfortable, and evidently there was worse coming, for my rent would be due before long. Nevertheless, things were not a quarter as bad as I had expected. For, when you are approaching poverty, you make one discovery which outweighs some of the others. You discover boredom and mean complications and the beginnings of hunger, but you also discover the great redeeming feature of poverty: the fact that it annihilates the future. Within certain limits, it is actually true that the less money you have, the less you worry. When you have a hundred francs in the world you are liable to the most craven panics. When you have only three francs you are quite indifferent; for three francs will feed you till tomorrow, and you cannot think further than that. You are bored, but you are not afraid. You think vaguely, 'I shall be starving in a day or two--shocking, isn't it?' And then the mind wanders to other topics. A bread and margarine diet does, to some extent, provide its own anodyne.

The first day, too inert to look for work, I borrowed a rod and went fishing in the Seine, baiting with bluebottles. I hoped to catch enough for a meal, but of course I did not. The Seine is full of dace, but they grew cunning during the siege of Paris, and none of them has been caught since, except in nets. On the second day I thought of pawning my overcoat, but it seemed too far to walk to the pawnshop, and I spent the day in bed, reading the *Memoirs Of Sherlock Holmes*. It was all that I felt equal to, without food. Hunger reduces one to an utterly spineless, brainless condition, more like the after-effects of influenza than anything else. It is as though one had been turned into a jellyfish, or as though all one's blood had been pumped out and luke-warm water substituted. Complete inertia is my chief memory of hunger; that, and being obliged to spit very frequently, and the spittle being curiously white and flocculent, like cuckoo-spit. I do not know the reason for this, but everyone who has gone hungry several days has noticed it.

The two pounds that B. had given me lasted about ten days. That it lasted so long was due to Paddy, who had learned parsimony on the road and considered even one sound meal a day a wild extravagance. Food, to him, had come to mean simply bread and margarine--the eternal tea-and-two-slices, which will cheat hunger for an hour or two. He taught me how to live, food, bed, tobacco, and all, at the rate of half a crown a day. And he managed to earn a few extra shillings by 'glimming' in the evenings. It was a precarious job, because illegal, but it brought in a little and eked out our money.



## EXCERPTS

## THE POOR MOUTH

BY FLANN O'BRIEN

There was a man in this townland at one time and he was named Sitric O'Sanassa. He had the best hunting, a generous heart and every other good quality which earn praise and respect at all times. But alas! there was another report abroad concerning him which was neither good nor fortunate. He possessed the very best poverty, hunger and distress also. He was generous and open-handed and he never possessed the smallest object which he did not share with the neighbors; nevertheless, I can never remember him during my time possessing the least thing, even the quantity of little potatoes needful to keep body and soul joined together. In Corkadorgha,

where every human being was sunk in poverty, we always regarded him as recipient of alms and compassion. The gentlemen from Dublin who came in motors to inspect the paupers praised him for his Gaelic poverty and stated that they never saw anyone who appeared so truly Gaelic. One of the gentlemen broke a little bottle of water which Sitric had, because, said he, it spoiled the effect. There was no one in Ireland coparable to O'Sanassa in the excellence of his poverty; the amount of famine which was delineated in his person. He had neither pig nor cup nor any household goods. In the depths of winter I often saw him on the hillside fighting and competing with a stray dog, both contending for a narrow hard bone and the same snorting and angry barking issuing from them both. He had no cabin either, nor any acquaintance with shelter or kitchen heat. He had excavated a hole with his

two hands in the middle of the countryside and over its mouth he had placed old sacks and branches of trees as well as any useful object that might provide shelter against the water which came down on the countryside every night. Strangers passing by thought that he was a badger in the earth when they perceived the heavy breathing which came from the recesses of the hole as well as the wild appearance of the habitation in general.



## EXCERPTS

## THE WOMAN WARRIOR

BY MAXINE HONG KINGSTON

The first night I burned half of the wood and slept curled against the mountain. I heard the white tigers prowling on the other side of the fire, but I could not distinguish them from the snow patches. The morning rose perfectly. I hurried along, again collecting wood and edibles. I ate nothing and only drank the snow my fires made run.

The first two days were gifts, the fasting was easy to do, I so smug in my strength that on the third day, the hardest, I caught myself sitting on the ground opening the scarf and staring at the nuts and dry roots. Instead of walking steadily on or even eating, I faded into dreams about the meat meals my mother used to cook, my monk's food forgotten. That night I burned up most of the wood I had collected, unable to sleep for facing my death—if not death here, then death someday. The moon animals that did not hibernate came out to hunt, but I had given up the habits of a carnivore since living with the old people. I would not trap the mice that danced so close or the owls that plunged just outside the fire. On the fourth and the fifth days, my eyesight sharp with hunger, I saw deer and used their trails when our ways coincided. Where the deer nibbled, I gathered the fungus, the fungus of immortality.

At noon on the tenth day I packed snow, white as rice, into the worn centre of a rock pointed out to me by a finger of ice, and around the rock I built a fire. In the warming water I put roots, nuts and the fungus of immortality. For variety I ate a quarter of the nuts and roots raw. Oh, green joyous rush inside my mouth, my head, my stomach, my toes, my soul—the best meal of my life.

One day I found that I was striding long distances without hindrance, my bundle light. Food had become so scarce that I was no longer stopping to collect it. I had walked into dead land. Here even the snow stopped. I did not go back to the richer areas, where I could not stay anyway, but, resolving to fast until I got halfway to the next woods, I started across

the dry rocks. Heavily weighed down by the wood on my back, branches poking maddeningly, I had burned almost all of the fuel not to waste strength lugging it.

Somewhere in the dead land I lost count of the days. It seems as if I had been walking forever; life had never been different from this. An old man and an old woman were help I had only wished for. I was fourteen years old and lost from my village. I was walking in circles. Hadn't I already been found by the old people? Or was that yet to come? I wanted my mother and father. The old man and old woman were only a part of this lostness and this hunger.

One nightfall I ate the last of my food but had enough sticks for a good fire. I stared into the flames, which reminded me about helping my mother with the cooking and made me cry. It was very strange looking through water into fire and seeing my mother again. I nodded, orange and warm.

A white rabbit hopped beside me, and for a moment I thought it was a blob of snow that had fallen out of the sky. The rabbit and I studied each other. Rabbits taste like chickens. My mother and father had taught me how to hit rabbits over the head with wine jugs, then skin them cleanly for fur vests. "It's a cold night to be an animal," I said. "So you want some fire too, do you? Let me put on another branch, then." I would not hit it with the branch. I had learned from rabbits to kick backwards. Perhaps this one was sick because normally the animals did not like fire. The rabbit seemed alert enough, however, looking at me so acutely, bounding up to the fire. But it did not stop when it got to the edge. It turned its face once towards me, then jumping into the fire. The fire went down for a moment, as if crouching in surprise, then the flames shot up taller than before. When the fire became calm again, I saw the rabbit had turned into meat, browned just right. I ate it, knowing the rabbit had sacrificed itself for me. It had made me a gift of meat.

When you have been walking through trees hour after hour—and I finally reached trees after the dead land—branches cross out everything, no relief whichever way your head turns

until your eyes start to invent new sights. Hunger also changes the world—when eating can't be a habit, then neither can seeing. I saw two people made of gold dancing the earth's dances. They turned so perfectly that together they were the axis of the earth's turning. They were light; they were molten, changing gold—Chinese lion dancers, African lion dancers in midstep. I heard high Javanese bells deepen in midring to Indian bells, Hindu Indian, American Indian. Before my eyes, gold bells shredded into gold tassels that fanned into two royal capes that softened into lion's fur. Manes grew tall into feathers that shone—became light rays. Then the dancers danced the future—a machine-future—in clothes I had never seen before. I am watching the centuries pass in moments because suddenly I understand time, which is spinning and fixed like the North Star. And I understand how working and hoeing are dancing; how peasant clothes are golden, as kings' clothes are golden; how one of the dancers is always a man and the other a woman.



The man and woman grow bigger and bigger, so bright. All light. They are tall angels in two rows. They have high white wings on their backs. Perhaps there are infinite angels; perhaps I see two angels in their consecutive moments. I cannot bear their brightness and cover my eyes, which hurt from opening so wide without a blink. When I put my hands down to look again, I recognize the old brown man and the old grey woman walking towards me out of the pine forest.

It would seem that this small crack in the mystery was opened, not so much by the old people's magic, as by hunger. Afterwards, whenever I did not eat for long, as during famine or battle, I

could stare at ordinary people and see their light and gold. I could see their dance. When I get hungry enough, then killing and falling are dancing too.

The old people fed me hot vegetable soup. Then they asked me to talk-story about what happened in the mountains of the white tigers. I told them the white tigers had stalked me through the snow but that I had fought them off with burning branches, and my great-grandparents had come to lead me safely through the forests. I had met a rabbit who taught me about self-immolation and how to speed up transmigration: one does not have to become worms first but can change directly into a human being—as in our humaneness we had just changed bowls of vegetable soup into people too. That made them laugh. "You tell good stories," they said. "Now go to sleep, and tomorrow we will begin your dragon lesson."



## EXCERPTS

## OLIVER TWIST

BY CHARLES DICKENS

For the first six months after Oliver Twist was removed, the system was in full operation. It was rather expensive at first, in consequence of the increase in the undertaker's bill, and the necessity of taking in the clothes of all the paupers, which fluttered loosely on their wasted, shrunken forms, after a week or two's gruel. But the number of workhouse inmates got thin as well as the paupers; and the board were in ecstasies.

The room in which the boys were fed, was a large stone hall, with a copper at one end: out of which the master, dressed in an apron for the purpose, and assisted by one or two women, ladled the gruel at mealtimes. Of this festive composition each boy had one porringer, and no more—except on occasions of great public rejoicing, when he had two ounces and a quarter of bread besides.

The bowls never wanted washing. The boys polished them with their spoons till they shone again; and when they had performed this operation (which never took very long, the spoons being nearly as large as the bowls), they would sit staring at the copper, with such eager eyes, as if they could have devoured the very bricks of which it was composed; employing themselves, meanwhile, in sucking their fingers most assiduously, with the view of catching up any stray splashes of gruel that might have been cast thereon. Boys have generally excellent appetites. Oliver Twist and his companions suffered the tortures of slow starvation for three months: at last they got so voracious and wild with hunger, that one boy, who was tall for his age, and hadn't been used to that sort of thing (for his father had kept a small cook-shop), hinted darkly to his companions, that unless he had another basin of gruel per diem, he was afraid he might some night happen to eat the boy who slept next him, who happened to be a weakly youth of tender age. He had a wild, hungry eye; and they implicitly believed him. A council was held; lots were cast who should walk

up to the master after supper that evening, and ask for more; and it fell to Oliver Twist.

The evening arrived; the boys took their places. The master, in his cook's uniform, stationed himself at the copper; his pauper assistants ranged themselves behind him; the gruel was served out; and a long grace was said over the short commons. The gruel disappeared; the boys whispered each other, and winked at Oliver; while his next neighbors nudged him. Child as he was, he was desperate with hunger, and reckless with misery. He rose from the table; and advancing to the master, basin and spoon in hand, said: somewhat alarmed at his own temerity:

'Please, sir, I want some more.'

The master was a fat, healthy man; but he turned very pale. He gazed in stupefied astonishment on the small rebel for some seconds, and then clung for support to the copper. The assistants were paralysed with wonder; the boys with fear.

'What!' said the master at length, in a faint voice.

'Please, sir,' replied Oliver, 'I want some more.'

The master aimed a blow at Oliver's head with the ladle; pinioned him in his arm; and shrieked aloud for the beadle.

The board were sitting in solemn conclave, when Mr. Bumble rushed into the room in great excitement, and addressing the gentleman in the high chair, said,

'Mr. Limbkins, I beg your pardon, sir! Oliver Twist has asked for more!'

There was a general start. Horror was depicted on every countenance.

'For more!' said Mr. Limbkins. 'Compose yourself, Bumble, and answer me distinctly. Do I understand that he asked for more, after he had eaten the supper allotted by the dietary?'

'He did, sir,' replied Bumble.

'That boy will be hung,' said the gentleman in the white waistcoat. 'I know that boy will be hung.'

Nobody controverted the prophetic gentleman's opinion. An animated discussion took place.

Oliver was ordered into instant confinement; and a bill was next morning pasted on the outside of the gate, offering a reward of five pounds to anybody who would take Oliver Twist off the hands of the parish. In other words, five pounds and Oliver Twist were offered to any man or woman who wanted an apprentice to any trade, business, or calling.

'I never was more convinced of anything in my life,' said the gentleman in the white waistcoat, as he knocked at the gate and read the bill next morning: 'I never was more convinced of anything in my life, than I am that that boy will come to be hung.'

As I purpose to show in the sequel whether the white waistcoated gentleman was right or not, I should perhaps mar the interest of this narrative (supposing it to possess any at all), if I ventured to hint just yet, whether the life of Oliver Twist had this violent termination or no.





## DARK DESIRES

BY LUISA VALENZUELA

A woman slowly  
 Ate  
 A man.  
 First she told him,  
 Open your mouth, and  
 he opened as if  
 To swallow,  
 But he was swallowed  
 (the ambiguous condition of  
 the glove that contains the  
 hand and loses its identity  
 as a glove: it is the hand)  
 The man obeyed and opened  
 his mouth, wide,  
 The woman slid down his  
 throat and began gnawing  
 Bit by bit,  
 Starting with the sleeves of his  
 intestines until she reached  
 His heart.  
 The hunger of the swallower  
 was less urgent than the  
 Hunger of the swallowed  
 A very voracious man swallowed  
 a woman and was very  
 calmly eaten.  
 El hambre es el lobo del hombre.  
 (Hunger is a man's wolf.)

## RIVULETS OF THE DEAD JEW

BY CHARLES BERNSTEIN

Fill my plate with *boudin noir*  
*Boudin noir, boudin noir*  
 Fill my plate with a hi-heh-ho  
 & rumble I will go

Don't dance with me  
 'til I cut my tie  
 Cut my tie, cut my tie  
 Don't fancy me 'til  
 The rivers run dry  
 & a heh & a hi & a ho

I've got a date with a  
 Bumble bee, bumble bee  
 I've got a date with a  
 wee bonnie wee  
 & a hurtling we will go



## THE TWO CITIES

BY DORIS LESSING

Long sheltered avenues of light,  
 the streets;  
 And crowds all gay and laughing;  
 for the rain,  
 That unexpected challenger of  
 human warmth  
 Swarmed down the walls and  
 shook their world like hands;  
 But with a pleasant shock, like  
 cold showers after hot.  
 Pleasant the light reminder of the  
 dangerous gods,  
 Shut out with walls and roofs and  
 certain food to come:  
 For it was lunch-hour on the  
 pavements; all the town  
 Was full of good warm smells  
 and people going home.

But as the rain grew thin, and the  
 shelterers passed on,  
 Two black children strayed on the  
 kerb to sniff the smells  
 And watch the eaters shut behind  
 the brilliant glass.  
 The rain was clinging to their  
 backs in sodden folds,  
 And no one raised his head to see  
 them wandering,  
 Hungry and cold, wanting what  
 never had been theirs,  
 Small outcasts from the open city  
 down the hill.  
 But the guarded town, the citadel  
 of pride,  
 Shuddered as it watched: goose-  
 pimples with the rain,  
 And huddled in its grey, it wept  
 from fear and pain.



## FROM DEATH CATS/ EL GATO EFICAZ

BY LUISA VALENZUELA

*Wanted: Teachers to teach hunger.*

—Roberto Juarroz

We are the guardians of this world; the other world should look after itself: it doesn't need any love or watching over. An irreverent unfolding of fleshless beings, nobody will be there anymore to watch over it, or to turn their head with amazement or to... I am the distinguished maestro Sir Isidro, I can't wallow in the swamp, in the black mountains of rock coal, in the intestinal life of the oil pipelines, in that covered cloaca of hide that is the human being.

There ought to be teachers who teach hunger, I read maybe in the want ads section of some morning paper. Or maybe in a book of poems I scanned perchance unawares, since I am the poet Sir Isidro, the isidro-poet, and few, other than myself, can utter the truth.

To be sure, I recognize in this sentence the voice of the one who calls me. They need

teachers to teach hunger and all they can think of is me. My musical ear would compose symphonies of meteorisms and would sequence the tick-tock of empty innards. My savvy aesthetic vision would uncover the sweet greenish blush of those beings whose ribs are showing.

There are those who are folded in two like an elbow, those who are that and nothing else: green elbows bent into a V to pinch the bellies of the stunted children (a belly like an inflated balloon, inflated like a kite to the heavens that only I know how to fly, since I am their teacher in hunger, giving them a little more air—the only thing I have to offer).

I treat my teaching like a priesthood. The official appointment has already arrived; all that's left to settle is the salary figure.

It takes all kinds, no doubt about it. Malnourishment, nutrition: it doesn't matter. I knew a good man who used to feed on tears: the abundant tears of the woman he abandoned on a street corner. He would return home satisfied,

he wouldn't have a bite to eat, his wife would insult him but what difference was it to him, engorged as he was with tears?

There are people who search for the most furtive and complicated juices, like the lactic acid of fatigue or even adrenaline. These are the saddest and the most damaging.

I found him with a sign on his back that said "For sale, cheap": you have to pay for your vices as best you can, harvest dirty pesos of disdain to purchase a voyage to tears, an eternal trek that leaves her exhausted, or a good fright that leaves the woman trembling, leaking adrenaline.

Nothing comes easily these days; people are really stingy with secretions.



## THE SMOOCHERS

BY STEVE KATZ

*to commemorate a brief conversation with Anselm Hollo about Charles Bukowski held some time in the early 80's*

*with cameo appearances by Ernest Hemingway, Joanna Russ, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Mark Leyner, Norman Lear, Chuck Wachtel, Isak Dinesen, Harold Schimmel, Gary Busey, Ted Berrigan, Joy Williams, Ted Greenwald*

The doors to Harriet's Grill Pub open and two men walk out. Past closing time now, for me the end. The kitchen shut down an hour ago. We are less than a week after the election. The few bags left of puffed pork rinds hang from a rack. And the bar has closed on me. I think I voted. I think I voted for the moose, but maybe the crocodile. I'm alone as usual at the end with my double Turkey on the rocks. It warms in my hands as the ice melts. I like one big gulp before I leave. Where do I go next is always my question? My own nest? I manage life like a rat in a hole, the rat's life is what I enjoy, bless their slippery souls. They tell me I smell sour as the dump, though my own sniffer is worn out, and except for a whiff of the woman at the other end of the bar, I don't smell much.

Like me she's a regular here, but I haven't talked to her yet. She probably voted for the butterflies, and she got the mosquitoes. I am as usual alone. We eye each other along the bar as the drinks slide through. I can taste her from here. Her name is Beverly or Eloise. I don't remember. Alice? Her face wrinkles with the pain in her life. Is it her pain that pushed her into the soak or too big dipso that laid the maniac onto her look? I'm easy. Just check out my nose. It starts as a tree trunk and ends as a fig ready to bust open. Pleasures without reward, and pressure without release. That's us. Whatever beauty she had back then, and all of us have had a touch at some point in the life, all plowed under. That Irish face or maybe Slovenian, the tough furrowed product, vulnerable and bitter. Molly? Esther? Perhaps.

We slip closer together.

"We do closing time again. Just you and me. You 'lom (she could have meant to say "glom" but in her current state has a fear of the gutturals) onto me like that and

never a word? Look and look and you never say nothing? Are we married?" Her words dissolve into the slur of her voice.

"I never married again," I say. "I'm even too shy to talk to a woman." The jays battle the blackbirds that nest in the long grass outside. They know this is almost dawn. The humans should be gone.

"You stare too. At me."

"For sure. I have lonesome staring girl scout patch. I drink always here so I can look at good humans."

"And we both look so good."

A quick chuckle sets us coughing. Nancy? Meghan? Maybe a state like Nevada or Dakota. Rhode Island? No parents would give their kid Rhode Island. Not as a name, I knew a Hope once. And a Patience. This is neither Hope nor Patience. Why don't I just ask her? I don't. She puckers forward to kiss and catches my nose and sucks down the boogers and the drip. Now my nostrils are open. It's been like forever since that. I kiss both her eyes. The mascara is bitter. "We are doomed," I sing into my sleeve. "Doom da doom doom."

We leave together. No ifs, ands, or buts, Grandpa Shlomo used to say. I was named after him, but a little different. The woman's knees wobble. I have to hold her steady as she goes. Nor am I so steady where I go.

"Please hold me up while..." She pisses on my sneakers.

"Don't you need to squat?"

"I like to stand. Hold me up, please, Mr. ... Mr. ..."

"Steven." I can ask her name now, but I don't.

"Ph or the v?"

"V for victory, no ph acid / alkaline stuff." She doesn't volunteer her name. Holly? No.

Encouraged by her gush my bladder releases and soaks my jeans. We next can build a boat so we sail down piss river to my place a few blocks away. Agnes? Lori?

The two men are stuck, still near the door. They giggle like girls in seventh grade, and rotate aimlessly.



"Can we do some assistance?" asks my limp companion, sounding almost sober. "Some help or comfort in the confusion?"

They look at her as if she has risen from the curbside garbage. "We are not confused, thank you very much. But we are benighted maybe with gin." They dress like corporate gentleman slaves, striped ties and polished black Oxfords. Cuff links too. "Which way is the Marriott?" they ask, as if they don't expect an answer.

"I know the Marriott," she says with all the dignity she can slur.

"O for sure," says the more drunk of the two. He bows and his friend has to hold him from falling face first into the gutter. "And in what capacity were you there, young lady?"

"I was CEO of Puplettes. Back in the day when I was a CEO. This Marriot is a couple of blocks East. That way." She points out over the cityscape that slopes away from us, lit here and there by houses. They are luminous as fires by camps on

the savannah, burning all night to keep the beasts away. "And why do you young men want the Marriott?"

"My wife has our room. She knows about us." He kisses his companion on both cheeks and then on the lips. "Says she's too sick for gin. Too sick to have a drink with us. She had a fever. Her forehead hot hot. I'm going to kill her."

"No don't kill. Why kill?"

"Make everything simpler. Dead wife no strife. All she has to do is show up. She doesn't even do... The only..."

"What's her name?"

Atta girl! The right question at the right time.

"You want to know?"

"Everyone wants to know."

"I want to know." I pipe in.

"Olio's the name," says the husband. "When she was born, her parents..."

“Everybody’s favorite cooky. Oreo. Everyone,” says my gal.

“Fuck you,” they say as one, and kiss again on the lips, then start towards their hotel.

“Fuck them,” they say loud enough for us to hear. “Fuck them all,” they agree with each other and stagger down the street into the weatherless early light. Down the boulevard the city rolls out wild. An enormous roar fills the shallow expanse. It rattles through my bones. Do you hear that? Roar, she roars in her smallest voice.

“Do you think the wife is in danger?”

“Everyone is in danger.”

They are on their way to the Marriott, maybe to kiss, maybe to kill. In this fine early dimness before dawn it’s hard to tell. Death and the gentlemen strolling together.

She and myself look at each other and laugh, Why are we laughing? What are these noises in the inebriated universe? “Fuck ‘em,” we say, and then we say, “Fuck ‘em.” and it makes us laugh. At least we have this in common. We laugh again.

“What was Puplettes? You were CEO?”

“I made that up. I have a very good brain to make a big surprise. But I do have that Marriott in my basket. I’m sure I was a CEO somewhere, once or twice.”

“That’s like when I was an engineer.”

“You, engineer?”

“I read the water meters for the city. They called me a hydro... hydro...”

“Engineer,” she sang out.

We stop at Shedd’s All Night Liquor. There are times on a long bender when you are more sober than when you’re sober. Like when you buy a bottle. A quart of the Turkey I grab. She lifts the bag from my hand as soon as we’re out of the store. Is it Nora? Or maybe Nuclear? Why can’t I just ask her? What’s your name? Simple as that. But I don’t. Maybe I am afraid to lose face? What is that? Who’s got face to lose?

She slips the bottle out of the bag and kisses the turkey on the label. “God bless you,” she says. That’s my

girl, I burp up a tidbit of chicken wing. My girl for now, just for now. Joan of Arc I would call her in this hour. Why not? Drunk Pussy of Arc. Suddenly I need to get laid.

The door to my mansion is stuck shut. I never lock. The lock is anyway busted. My philosophy is never to own anything someone might like to steal. Though that is unkind to the common thief. But own only crap. Most of my possessions are gross, odious to the average man, or the common woman. Even my clothes, all greasy. These are my vestments, though I do keep a few clean shirts in case I have to meet the taxman. The door takes a blow from my shoulder, and then from the lady’s, before it pops open.

anyone still call it the head? And maybe that’s her name, Lou.

I flop on the bed and unbuckle and start to jerk off. When your woman is on the loo, that’s one of the best times to jerk off in this city of do’s and don’ts. You lie back and fantasize about the load she is dumping, the brown pool she is culminating. O if life were only good like this, I wouldn’t be so lonesome.

It takes a while for her to finish her duty. I don’t make wood any more, can get only half hard or half soft, depending on how you look at it. I am satisfied with pulling like on a hagfish or a puppy shar pei. She comes out and looks around for me. She has neglected to wipe herself so I have

my left hand while I send a fine stream of pressurized water vibrating into her puckered little toothhole, or what determinists might call The Exit. See my good brain. I told you. What difference does it make? Oooh, she moans. Clean as a whistle once I am done. Flakes of her stuff stain the towel I spread at her feet.

O it tickles, she sighs. She relaxes. Yum, Steven with a v, this feels like a commotion of dreamy, small dreams in my booty butt, she sings. Petals! Petals raining down on me. I love this more than I love... a caterpillar. I’ll do it for you if you want me to. Let me do you, please.

I am at that stage, a clearly drowsy stage of wobbling knees and drooping eyes. Almost gone. Gone



My hands on her flanks try to steer her to the bed but I see she really needs the bathroom. Her jeans drop to her ankles. I’m so sorry, she says. Nice waif this one, in the dreary world of aging adults. Diarrhea drips from her butt crack onto the shag carpet. It’s not the first time. There will never be a first time. I grab a roll of paper towels and follow her to the toilet with the quicker-picker-upper. She leaves a wide puddle of shit on the small pentagonal tiles next to the loo. Those are some tiles of yesteryear, I think. I call it the loo when I want to sound British. I almost never want to sound British. I am an American, and proud of it. But I won’t call it the head. Does

to do it for her. Then I remember the waterpik Sophie left me when she went back to Wisconsin to take care of her father. Take good care of this, she said. I never use it. This time I fill it with warm water and take her hand to lead her to the bed. I need a drink, she says. So do I, say I. Then I fill two tumblers with Turkey. Some ice in mine, she shouts at me. I take it neat. Turkey is best as Turkey.

There’s a tray of ice cubes in the fridge, and I drop some into her glass. The ice is grey as the dust bunnies under the bed. How did that happen? She slugs down a big gulp, and I bend her over again, spread her buttocks with

with the mind. Wait a second, I say, and I fetch the Turkey from the kitchen table and top off our drinks. She stands there now wielding the wand of this implement, striping the room with its fine stream. At any stage of my drunk or before or after I will have a tough time resisting any woman with a waterpik.

You like that? she asks as I am bent over the bed for her treatment. I can’t see her from this angle, but she sounds like she really cares. It feels good, like an Instronaut streaming all the way to your most hidden your intimate cavities. She will do you small favors. I feel myself

breathe. "... a spritz of color / in this life / is what we can expect..."

"What is that?" she asks.

"Don't stop now. It's from a poem I heard once. I heard it. Don't stop." Suddenly a great fart, and my bowels erupt, and spray across the room splashing her pink nipples and blue veined breasts. I fill the bellybutton of my beloved. "Nice," she sings out.

"That was a Poem!" she sings again.

"It makes me cry. Do you ever think," she says, and she sounds almost sober, "of how much shit anyone produces in a lifetime, like close to a pound a day, measured by the people who do measurements?"

"How do you know a pound? What's your source?" I wiggle and splash the stream around.

"Believe me. I know better than anyone. I told you I have a very good brain.

"She does. I don't know her name, but I've witnessed her brain.

"What I think would be good," she says, "for mankind, for womankind, for the nation, for the world of words and moves, would be that at the pearly gates (do you think they're really pearly? Pearl is too precious to waste)." A rat watches us from a dark corner near the closet. I know that rat. May it be blessed by the god of rats. She kept going. "Every one should stand and be measured against the heap of his lifetime production. I mean, my Steven with a v, not even Balzac with all the novels of his Human Comedy, and all his other writings, nor Joyce Carol Oates who writes two or three books a year, nor the great Carl Jung who produced book after book, theory after theory, produced enough work to measure up to the weight and volume of their own excrement. I say excrement because I want you to think well of me. I'm not a barfly, only. I am impressive. Nor Haydn, nor Bach, nor Philip Glass who writes opera after opera several each year plus the other works of symphonies, concertos, sonatas, can measure their works (though who can weigh music?) against the lifelong heap of their production. Perhaps some sculptors, or painters can weigh their art against their shit and make art come out on top, given several days of constipation or the runs. I think this assessment should be made

at the application you submit to enter heaven. Stand by your heap. Otherwise, what is there to live for."

This is it. I love this woman. Margaret maybe. Except this Margaret doesn't grieve the shedding of leaves, and the barren grove from which she spans (She spans me now, spanking and squirting, squirting and spanking.) never has any foliage to lose. But Margaret is a good one for her. I mean name. Look it up.

I'm so drunk, she croaks, her voice scratchy reptilian. We toss the waterpik and I yank her onto the bed like the man I'm supposed to be, roll on top of her and wipe my half hard along her dry crack. I vomit onto her face. We welcome this and smush around coughing into the green golden swamp juice speckled with tid-bits of mixed nuts, pork rind, pickled egg and some other stuff.

"I'm not your human shmata," she whines.

"Shmata?" I'm a New Yorker, and I know from shmata, but I want to keep this conversation alive so I pretend I don't get it. I'm surprised she had the word at all.

"You don't know shmata? Mr. Steven with a v. Wake up. You should get yourself a life."

"I've got a life."

"Show me."

"This is my life." I lift the empty bottle in the air. I gesture around the room, "And this is my temple."

While settling down on Mr. Peeps, my shy little snorky hiding somewhere down there, she upchucks everything she had in her all over my belly. Something was alive in it, that slithered off the bed into the corner where my rat grabbed it for breakfast. I call my rat Tarzan. In the culture of the people of my moiety maybe this is sex? It feels good to me, blissful to rest here in the green golden pool, reeking of each other, happy to be together in our relief. I pour the rest of the Turkey over us. An ablution. Blessed Turkey for its bouquet, for its finish, for its holy burn. The mattress absorbs the wet as it has done plenty times before. We sound like a squeegee when we move, which we don't much, happy to be still together with an ecstasy of dawn outside at the horizon.

After the exertions of night, and all the perks of sexual exhaustion, it is sheer pleasure, a quiet exhilaration to lie together in the warm fluids and speak in tones of reverie and nostalgia. "Do you remember," I ask her, my baritone like a cashmere blanket, "when all the automobiles took their names from food? I sang a few verses of 'Those Were The Days' and felt the spirit of Archie Bunker fill my heart with hot-dogs. Cars like the Chevy Knish, the DeSoto Cheeseburger, the little Nash Alfredo, I always wanted a Packard Porterhouse, a totally elegant ride, and the Oldsmobile Empanada. When my father died he left me his Studebaker Pierogi, a car design way ahead of its time. Made in South Bend, Indiana. I sold it then. If I kept it I bet I'd be rich today. What do you think? Where do you find a Studebaker Pierogi today? Or a Lancia Parmigiana? A Lamborghini mozzarella, a Maserati and Aston Martin on a skewer by Bentley." I wanted to call her by her name, but I had no name for her. The name gives a person shape and history.

"Steven with a v, please don't leave me here alone."

"I live here little one."

"You live... Because if you leave there will be no one here in the morning to shake the scorpions out of my boots. Nobody..." At this appeal her voice took on the tones of a voice from way back, another time in her life, a sweet seductive charm in the syllables.

"You don't ever wear boots. Only flip-flops, only flats."

She was already asleep. The time had passed, the time had come. She snored bubbles into our soup. She even resembled someone pretty with her face relaxed into the smells of Morpheus.

When I woke up in the late afternoon, she was gone. Of course. Why would she stay? Only to squabble? So she could watch me snore? I was always ready to squabble as soon as I woke up, except I don't squabble any more. Too old to squabble. Best I can do is to call on the Bright Belly people. They will come and clean my place, floor to ceiling. And in the Spring they'll bring lilacs. My place will smell like lilacs in the Spring.

But now I will know her name. Next time I will know it. I will sit down at the bar in Harriet's and ask Philly-Jane, who owns the place now. We all could sing "Those Were The Days."

When Harriet died she left the shop to her niece, Philly-Jane, a tough, ambitious lesbian missing both her eye teeth. She didn't change the name of the place, so Harriet's stayed alive still being Harriet's. I'll ask Philly-Jane, you know that woman who sits at the end of the bar most nights? Do you know her name?

If Philly-Jane doesn't know, I'll call my baby Pittsburgh or Emma-Lou, Tug-boat Minneapolis. Whatever I like, and that will be her name for me from then on.



## EXCERPT

HEADING SOUTH,  
LOOKING NORTH: A  
BILINGUAL JOURNEY

BY ARIEL DORFMAN

*The story thus far: born in Argentina in 1942, Ariel is taken at the age of two and a half to the United States, as his family flees a military regime with fascist tendencies. Ten years later, persecuted by McCarthy, the Dorfman family leaves New York for Santiago in 1954.*

It was not that I discovered the existence of misery when we went to live in Chile. I cannot, literally, remember a time in my life when I was not mindful of the fact that there were many in the world less fortunate than my family. I look back and see them there, on the rim of my life, watching me as I watched them, and what I recall is my compassion, my attempt to jump into their point of view, to beggar myself into their eyes, to wonder what hunger meant, what sickness meant, what despair meant, what it meant to die before having lived. But as there were not that many really indigent people around in booming New York after the Second World War, their mysterious destiny was, in a sense, an abstraction, they became an occasion for intellectual elaboration, to be explained away into comprehensible categories, particularly by my father. Whenever I asked why those harrowing figures of destitution haunted my books or comics or films (more than my streets), my father would use that example to educate me, point out that the poor existed as a direct, and necessary, consequence of the richness of a small minority.

Once we were in Chile, however, poverty ceased to be an abstraction. It was there the day we arrived, in the tired backs of the longshoremen on the docks as our ship creaked against its moorings; it was there in the weatherbeaten shacks clustered like flies on Valparaiso's hills; it was there in the bare feet of peasants laboring on fields that did not belong to them, scarcely raising their bronze faces as

our car whizzed by on the road to Santiago; it was there in the endless shantytowns of the capital, the urban sprawl of cardboard-and-tin hovels among the weeds and the stray dogs; it was there in the army of derelicts of all ages that crisscrossed the avenues of the city, sleeping under the bridges of the Mapocho and blanketing the steps of the churches as if they were crippled birds.

"You'll get used to that," a UN colleague of my father's said to me, in English, when he heard me expressing amazement at such widespread misery. "As there's not very much that you can do about it, anyway."

He was more right than wrong in his rather flippant assessment. Even if I could not avoid being intermittently embarrassed whenever a human being in distress came limping through my life, I was basically walled away from the poor of Chile in every possible way: I was young, I lived in a well-to-do neighborhood, and I attended a school which trained the elite that would govern this country and its wealth.

I did make one attempt to intervene in the quagmire of Chilean poverty. I must have been around fourteen and spoke enough Spanish to engage people outside my house in ordinary conversation, and one day when I was returning from the dentist's I had taken pity on a street urchin who was singing boleros on the bus. His voice was as cracked as his blistered feet. He was covered with scabs, his hair a shock of black sticky strands, his shirt torn. He couldn't have been more than six years old. I gave him a coin, asked him a question, he saw a friendly light in my eyes and, perhaps encouraged by my strange accent, he began to tell his story: how it was better to live on the streets than risk the beatings of a father who might or might not be around; how the *pacos* (the Chilean police) had picked him up one day and threatened to put him in an institution but he had fooled them and escaped; how once in a while he made his way home to his mother, who was always sweet to him and had taught him his repertory of lovelorn canciones. As he talked, our bus began to enter the *barrio alto*, where I lived, and as we passed the *façades* of

opulent estates behind which the upper classes lived in outrageous luxury, that little boy's condition became all the more pathetic, so that, when we reached my bus stop in a somewhat more modest part of the area, I impulsively invited him to come home with me for a hot meal. Our house was far from being a mansion; just a large, comfortable residence, but seen through his eyes, it took on the magnificence of a palace.

We had two servants—one who cooked and one who cleaned and served at table—and neither was delighted to see the seedy guest I had brought home. But my parents weren't around, so I was the boss. The kid chattered away while he ate, and then my mother came home and, after joining us for a moment, went off to rummage in the attic for some old clothes for the kid. I escorted my young friend to the door and told him that I hoped to see him again.

The very next day the doorbell rang and there he was. Again I invited him in for a good meal, but this time my mother didn't make an appearance with clothes or a welcoming smile, nor, when I said goodbye, did I suggest that we set up another meeting, suspecting that he would be back, anyway. I wasn't surprised when, twenty-four hours later, he turned up with two other waifs. This time I hesitated, but what was I to do? Turn them away? They marched into the kitchen and I sat them down in front of the cook and she frowned and extricated some leftovers from the fridge and warmed them, grumbling under her breath, and then the doorbell rang again and the maid went off to see who it was and came back and announced noncommittally, "Buscan." Somebody had come to see me.





Outside our gate stood the mother (at least she said she was) of my singing friend with a baby in her arms and a ragged older girl clinging to her dress. She asked if I had any work for her, for the girl. I told her to wait and went upstairs to my own mother, who took charge of the situation. She walked out to speak to the woman, gave her some money, informed her that unfortunately we had no work, and added that the boy and his friends would be out very soon.

Half an hour later, when all the intruders had left, my mother sat me down, complimented me on my good heart and told me firmly that this could not go on. This was not the way to solve the problems of Chile's perpetual underdevelopment. One beggar had begat two more and now others were clamoring at the door and this was incremental, there were too many indigent people out there and too few homes like ours that even cared. We would be overrun and unable to lead a normal life. I could, of course, if I was so inclined, sell my records and my books and my candy bars—but not my clothes! she added hastily—and turn them into cash for my afflicted chums. My mother warned me that within a few days the supply would be gone and I would be back exactly where I was now: they would still be as poor as ever and I would be as fed and clothed and housed as ever, the line dividing us would not have disappeared. Someday perhaps, I would be able to do something about that line and that poverty, just as my father had tried, but now was not the time and this was not the way.

The next afternoon I watched as the maid went out to the gate when my singing urchin came around again, with the same two pals, and with a couple of older kids hovering in the background. I watched from behind the curtains in a room filled with art books, a room where my mother played the piano to songs I sang in English, a room with an enormous reproduction

of a Siqueiros painting showing Latin America as a centaur in agony, half beast, half man, always divided, I watched the maid tell the kid that I wasn't home, and he looked straight at where I was hiding behind the curtains and then up toward the second story of our house, where my room was. I watched from that house filled with books that analyzed inequality and surplus value and economic underdevelopment and the philosophy of justice and the rights of indigenous peoples. I watched the boy turn away, and the next day he came one last time and I forced myself to contemplate his defeat and my defeat all over again, and that was it. After that, he never rang the bell again. He understood what had happened, the limits of my compassion, he came no more, and whatever guilt I felt was insufficient to make me interrupt the life I had led up until then. I continued my estranged existence in Chile almost as if nothing had happened. But I had learned something: the truth of who we were, the boy and I, the cards we had been dealt. I lived here, in a safe, happy house, the foreign, bilingual son of a diplomat going to the most exclusive school in Chile, and that child had nothing but his throat and his songs of adult love and betrayal to ward off death. I watched him wander off under the splendid trees of Santiago and the mountains that years later would urge me not to leave this country, and his tribulation and abandonment were made all the starker by the contrast they offered to the breathtakingly beautiful surroundings in which they festered, that land which had more than enough resources to feed him a million times over and could not even guarantee him, and so many others like him, one meal a day.

If I ended up transitorily trapped in the prophecy of my father's UN colleague, unable to intervene in the age-old injustice of Chile, I would not be left there for very long. All around me, thousands of other inhabitants of Chile were ready to take more decisive action.

Two hundred years before I arrived on the shores of that country and wondered how so much bounty could produce so much suffering, a Chilean named Jose Cos de Iribari had asked a similar question even before independence had been gained from Spain: How is it possible that, "in the midst of

the lavishness and splendor of [Latin American] nature," most of the population was "groaning under the yoke of poverty, misery and the vices which are their inevitable consequences"? And now, after that question, repeated by each generation of Chileans (and Latin Americans in the rest of the continent), had received no satisfactory answer, a left-wing movement of intellectuals and workers and peasants that had been forming during most of the century was gaining strength. Since colonial times, the same ruling classes, and their allies abroad, had kept a stranglehold on the country's economy and, most of the time, on its government as well, and the result had been social injustice, educational and technological stagnation, a scandalous disparity between the means and lifestyle of a small oligarchy and those of the vast impoverished nation, a productive system geared to the exigencies of the foreign marketplace rather than the needs of the citizens themselves. The left proclaimed that it was time to institute real reforms and wrest control of Chile's wealth from foreign corporations and a handful of greedy families. It was time for a different class to take power. It was time, they said, for a revolution.

It must have been around then, in 1956, that I first heard the name of Salvador Allende, a socialist doctor who had been the youngest Minister in the 1938 Popular Front government of Pedro Aguirre Cerda and who had, from that post, instituted the first social security and national health care system in Chile. He was now a senator and he had been instrumental in formulating a program that was supposed to solve the country's structural problems. Nationalize the copper, nitrate, carbon, iron mines, expropriate the main industries and banks, divide up the large haciendas among the peasants that worked the land. And this overturning of privilege was to be accomplished democratically, through the electoral process. It was a program virtually identical to the one Allende set in motion when he did when the Presidency in 1970.

*It is worth remarking that, of course, the Chilean revolution of 1970, brutally suppressed on September 11th, 1973, raised the standard of living of the immense majority of*

*the workers of the country—a gain that was lost during the ensuing seventeen years of dictatorship. Also worth noting: one of Allende's first decrees was that every child in Chile should be given, paid for by the States, half a liter of milk, medio litro de leche. And so, a tiny consolation. During the thousand glorious days of Allende, kids like the one I had welcomed to my house and then banished were not condemned to inevitable hunger.*

Ariel Dorfman, August 2017.



## ABOUT THE WRITERS

### MARGARET ATWOOD

Margaret Atwood is a Canadian writer born on November 18, 1939 in Ottawa, Canada. The internationally-known author has written award-winning poetry, short-stories and novels, including *The Circle Game* (1966), *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), *The Blind Assassin* (2000), *Oryx and Crake* (2003) and *The Tent* (2006). Her works have been translated into an array of different languages and seen several screen adaptations, with both *Handmaid's Tale* and *Alias Grace* becoming miniseries in 2017.

### MARK AXELROD

Mark Axelrod is a graduate of both Indiana University and the University of Minnesota. He has been the Director of the John Fowles Center for Creative Writing for which he has received five National Endowment for the Arts Grants. He has received numerous writing awards including two United Kingdom Leverhulme Fellowships for Creative Writing as well as screenwriting awards from the Sundance Institute, the WGA East, and the Nicholl Fellowship. He recently received awards from the Irvine International Film Festival, the Chicago International Film Festival and the Illinois International Film Festival for his screenplays.

### CHARLES BERNSTEIN

Charles Bernstein was born in New York City in 1950. He received his B.A. from Harvard College. Among his more than twenty books of poetry are *Girly Man* (University of Chicago Press, 2006), *With Strings* (2001), *Republics of Reality: 1975-1995* (2000), *Dark City* (1994), *Rough Trades* (1991), *The Nude Formalism* (1989), *Stigma* (1981), *Legend* (with Bruce Andrews, Steve McCaffery, Ron Silliman, Ray DiPalma, 1980), and *Parsing* (1976).

### CHARLES DICKENS

Charles Dickens (February 7, 1812 to June 9, 1870) was a British novelist, journalist, editor, illustrator and social commentator who wrote such beloved classic novels as *Oliver Twist*, *A Christmas Carol*, *Nicholas Nickleby*, *David Copperfield*, *A Tale of Two Cities* and *Great Expectations*. Dickens is remembered as one of the most important and influential writers of the 19th century. Among his accomplishments, he has been lauded for providing a stark portrait of the Victorian era underclass, helping to bring about societal change. When Dickens died of a stroke, he left his final novel, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, unfinished.

### ARIEL DORFMAN

Ariel Dorfman, (born May 6, 1942, Buenos Aires, Argentina), is a Chilean American author and human rights activist whose plays and novels engage with the vibrant politically engaged Latin American literary tradition of Pablo Neruda and Gabriel García Márquez. Dorfman writes extensively on issues related to Latin American politics, American cultural hegemony, war, and human rights, publishing essays in both English and Spanish. He also works with organizations such as Amnesty International, Index on Censorship, and Human Rights Watch.

### EDUARDO GALEANO

Eduardo Galeano (1940-2015) was a Uruguyan writer, historian, and journalist. Best known for books such as *Football in Sun and Shadow* and *Open Veins of Latin America*, his writing significantly contributed to a greater global recognition and appreciation of Latin American literature. He once described himself as "a writer obsessed with remembering the past of America above all, and above all that of Latin America, intimate land condemned to forgetfulness."

### ALLEN GINSBERG

Allen Ginsberg (1926-1997) was one of the most influential poets of the 20th century. As a founding father and iconic artist in the Beat movement, Ginsberg published numerous collections of poetry, including *Howl and Other Poems* (1956); he was the recipient of a fellowship from the National Endowment of the Arts, the Robert Frost medal, and the Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres.

### KNUT HAMSDUN

Knut Hamsun was born into poverty in Lom, Norway in 1859. In his celebrated novels such as *Hunger*, *Pan*, and *Victoria*, he led a Neo-Romantic literary revolt against realism and naturalism. His innovative psychological realism and lyricism influenced writers including Franz Kafka and Ernest Hemingway; he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1920. Hamsun died in disgrace in 1952 after supporting the Nazi invasion of Norway; his *Complete Works* were published posthumously.







## MAXINE HONG KINGSTON

Maxine Hong Kingston was born in Stockton, California in 1940. Kingston's writing often blurs memoir and non-fiction with myth and fiction, exploring feminist themes, the anti-war movement, and the Chinese-American experience. She is the recipient of numerous awards and honors, including the National Book Award for *China Men* and the National Book Critics Circle Award for *The Woman Warrior*.

## DORIS LESSING

Doris Lessing (1919-2013) was born in Kermanshah and grew up in Rhodesia, but lived most of her life in England. She wrote in diverse genres, including novels, poetry, non-fiction, plays, short stories, and essays; her most famous novel *The Golden Notebook* portrays societal, political, and psychological fragmentation and collapse. She is celebrated as one of the greatest British writers of the century and was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2007.

## STEVE KATZ

Steve Katz was born in May of 1935, in the Bronx. He has never not been a Yankee fan. He lives now in Denver, Colorado, retired from teaching at the University of Colorado. His books include *The Exaggerations of Peter Prince*, *Saw*, and *Creamy & Delicious*. He is the recipient of grants from the National Endowment of the Arts and has been a featured reader at the &NOW Festival at Chapman University.

## FLANN O'BRIEN

Flann O'Brien (1911-1966) was a key figure in both postmodern literature and in twentieth century Irish literature. He published novels in both English and Irish, including *At Swim-Two-Birds*, *The Third Policeman*, and *An Béal Bocht*. He was also a prolific satirist, publishing innumerable short columns and pseudonymous letters in literary periodicals and *The Irish Times*.

## GEORGE ORWELL

George Orwell was born in India in 1903. His first book, *Down and Out in Paris and London*, is about his experiences as a struggling writer; he would later become one of the most famous authors of the twentieth century. After fighting for the Republicans in the Spanish Civil War, Orwell worked as a literary critic, novelist, and political journalist; his most famous works include *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

## IAN PRICHARD

Ian Prichard works in the water industry and lives in Los Angeles with his wife, kids, cats, and sourdough starter. He was educated at the University of Virginia (MA '05) and Chapman University (MFA '12). His writing has appeared in *The Mulberry Fork Review*, *Meat for Tea*, *Mantra*, and *The Post Game*.

## JONATHAN SWIFT

Born in Dublin in 1667, Jonathan Swift received his Doctorate of Divinity from Trinity College. A founding member of the Martinus Scriblerus Club, he published numerous literary, poetic, religious, and political works, all under pseudonyms, and is considered one of the most brilliant satirists in the English language. His most notable works include *Gulliver's Travels*, *Tale of a Tub*, and *A Modest Proposal*.

## LUISA VALENZUELA

Luisa Valenzuela was born in Buenos Aires in 1938. She writes powerful experimental fiction in both Spanish and English, including the novels *Como en la guerra*, *Cambio de armas*, and *Cola de lagartija*. She is the recipient of numerous awards and honorary degrees; she was awarded a Fullbright scholarship in 1969 and was nominated for a Nobel Prize in 2015.

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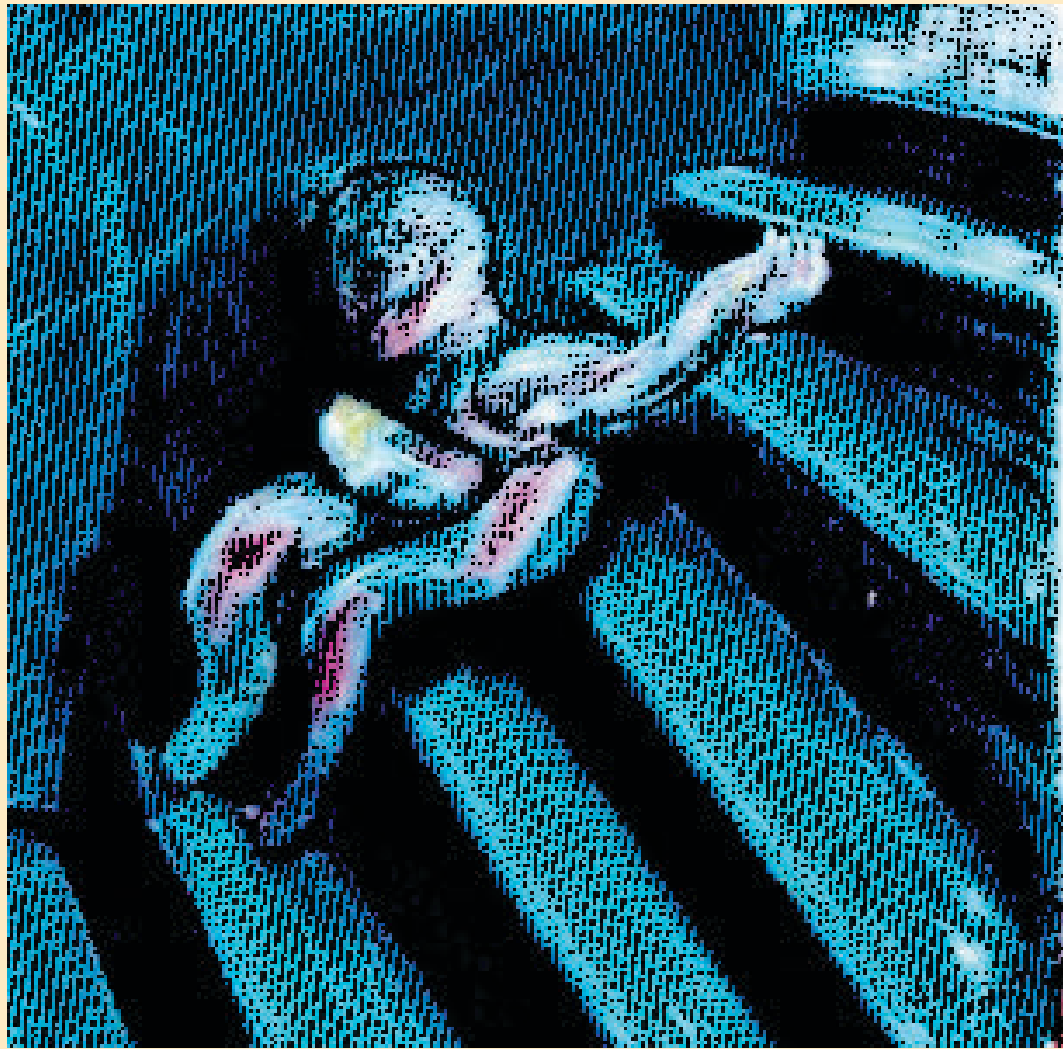
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