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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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.

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.

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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.

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Excerpts From The Book of Embraces by Eduardo Galeano

Painting by Ricardo Celma

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.
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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 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 Brooke-Rose, J.M. Coetzee, Maryse Condé, Ariel Dorfman, Raymond Federman, Eduardo Galeano, Allen Ginsberg, Günter Grass, Alasdair Gray, Thomas Kenneally, 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 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. 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 naivety 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 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.
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 “striped 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 Gingerich 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.
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.

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.

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

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 reckoned upon a medium that a child just born will weigh 12 pounds, and in a solar year, if tolerably nursed, increase to 28 pounds. I grant this food will be somewhat dear, and therefore very proper for landlords, who, as they have already devoted 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 cottage laborers, and five-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

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 children already computed, twenty thousand may be reserved for bread, 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 man may suffice 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 throughout 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.

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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, 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.
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 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.

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 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
CLARITY
BY IAN Pritchard

“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. She lay cradled in his open, shaky palm, the smell of stale bed and the fullness of circles, and the silence. “Wait.”

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.

For a moment Kira wondered if she was up, working, and annoyed. “I don’t like showing up like this,” he said, an ataxic gesture indicating all the different theses 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.”

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

Mantissa Journal Volume III Issue I
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 gaites 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 hunched 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 chafed their transactions up to a quick 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 staunched 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 let 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.
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 man from the dance?

Deer, dogs, men. My tree being more than a blunt twig. I see this tragic, poignant, hungry 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—he 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 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 employing, of course, a speckled and camouflaged fraudulence of the world.

I can my Pelikan pen and watch as the man at the foot of my tree rubs a thumb along the edge of his axe. He’s sharp. I sharpened it away on some furious path. 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, almost wholly black by the miseries of a bad, relentless luck. He shrieks but it’s soft, a warble from Iowa. Breaking himself from the dandy aesthetic morality. Emulating a dandy aesthetic morality. Emulating an aesthetic morality. Emulating an aesthetic morality. Emulating an aesthetic morality. Emulating an aesthetic morality. Emulating an aesthetic morality.

I see his eyes, kind yet charred far off, then a steely rustle far off, then a steely rustle. Another stone goes into his mouth. He wobbles, hand propped up. I see his eyes, kind yet charred far off, then a steely rustle. Another stone goes into his mouth. He wobbles, hand propped up. Another stone goes into his mouth. He wobbles, hand propped up. I see his eyes, kind yet charred far off, then a steely rustle. Another stone goes into his mouth. He wobbles, hand propped up. Another stone goes into his mouth. He wobbles, hand propped up. I see his eyes, kind yet charred far off, then a steely rustle.
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
butter sauce,
Buttered veal medallions in
creamy salleva, buttered
beef, by glistening
mountains of french fries
Stroganoffs in white hot sour
creme, 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 & ice cream
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 Lodz
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
fastfood freaks—
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 Njorno
Karabach Georgia

Poetry
John Fowles Center for Creative Writing, Chapman University
A singular sense of confusion went towards the railway station. My whole tissue of my brain was rent in two. I stumbled on, determined to ask the man for a shilling and to sit down on a step. My lips. This man's friendliness seemed to me beyond bounds, 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.

Hunger
by Knut Hamsun

It was three o'clock. Hunger began to assail me downright in earnest. I was faint, and now and again I had to retch furiously. I swung round by the Dampkökken, read the bill of fare, and shrugged my shoulders in a way to attract attention, as if corned beef or salt port was in a way to attract attention, as if corned beef or salt port was in the of/f_ice without having 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 pawing 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.
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.
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 warming water I put roots, nuts and hibernators, unable to stop when it got to the edge. It 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 father and mother. 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 of 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.

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 lesson.”

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—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 boys polished them with their
The bowls never wanted washing.
The room in which the boys were
was rather expensive at first, in
consequence of the increase
in the undertaker's bill, and
the necessity of taking in 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 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 aimed a blow at
Oliver's head with the ladle;
Mr. Limbkins was paralysed with
fury; the gruel was served
on a copper at one end: out of which
the board were sitting in solemn
conclave, when Mr. Bumble
who was full of 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.'
Alarmed at his own temerity, 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 aimed a blow at
Oliver's head with the ladle;
pinioned him in his arm; and
shrieked aloud for the beadle.
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
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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 caterers 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-
pimpled with the rain,
And huddled in its grey, it wept
from fear and pain.
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 isidropoet, 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, 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 mosquitos. 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 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 guttural’s 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 hums 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. “Olio’s the name,” says the more drunk. “O for sure,” says the other. “I’m 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...”

“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.

“Engineer,” she said. I almost want to sound British. I almost never want to sound British. I almost never want to sound like 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 shrapnel. She comes out and looks around for me. She has neglected to wipe herself so I have

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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 waff 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-pick-up-upper. She leaves a wide puddle of shit on the small pentagonal tiles next to the loo. Those are some tiles of yester-year, 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
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...”

“What is that?” she asks. “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 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, snapping and squirming, squirming and snapping) 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 don’t know 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 ablation. 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 snores 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 llacs. My place will smell like llacs in the Spring.
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 Dorfmans leave 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 andblanketing 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 canzones. 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 I was 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 the house almost as if nothing had happened. But I had learned something: the truth of who we were, the boy and I, the cards we were 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 fostered, 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 José Cos de Iribarri 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 America” 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 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 Uruguayan 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 Hamsun
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 Ideál 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 Full-bright scholarship in 1969 and was nominated for a Nobel Prize in 2015.
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