

READINGS

[Essay]

A MUTABLE FEAST

By Karl Ove Knausgaard, from "Pig Person," an essay in the collection In the Land of the Cyclops, which will be published this month by Archipelago Books. Translated from the Norwegian by Martin Aitken.

P reconceptions are a way of seeing in which the nature of what is seen is already determined. The opposite would be seeing with an open eye that accorded everything the same value, be it blood, vomit, excrement, dawns, lawns, lynx, maggots, roe, owls, hearts, crowds, monkeys, chairs, tables. This impartial eye would be unable to see any connection between different entities and phenomena, since perhaps our most important preconception has to do with what belongs together and what doesn't. It is how we organize the world, and what makes it possible for us to live in it. This, referred to by Foucault as the order of things, is something we take for granted and which eludes capture. It is the way the world is—unless we step outside that order and into another. Only then will it become visible as what it is: an arbitrary system.

In the seventeenth century, other parameters steered the eye, creating a different order and different systems; in the tenth century, still oth-

ers. The order of things is evident at an elementary level in Linnaeus's classification of plants, or in our ideas of what constitutes acceptable behavior in public and in private, and it is evident too in more obviously constructed concepts such as the nation-state. What these things have in common is not only that they connect and hold together the elements within them, but that they are exclusive. The idea of the holy excludes all that is not holy, the idea of the rational excludes all that is not rational, Michel Serres wrote somewhere. The first logic tells us we cannot implant a pig's heart into a human chest, it would be unethical, an impossible transgression, whereas the second logic, which sees the heart in functional terms, would consider it unproblematic, a heart is a heart as long as it does the job, no transgression.

Transgression scares the life out of me. Anything that departs from what I experience as normal, the accepted state of things, the world the way it's supposed to be, which of course is a moral imperative, makes me react strongly, often with disgust. I can't get used to it. Except in art and literature, where it's what I look for. Why? Because I want to see the world the way it is, which is something that is forever in the making, chaotic and incomprehensible, steered by laws we know absolutely nothing about, which also steer us. My search is existential, in contrast to the practical realities of day-to-day life, and takes place in the social world, where other laws apply. It is the desire for and the fear of

transgression I recognize, and the pull of the thought that what we call human—and what makes us so forcefully deny what we call the nonhuman—is also arbitrary.

In the art of ancient Greece, there was a different order, steered by different systems. Consider the tenth book in Homer's *Odyssey*, when Odysseus' men arrive at the house of the sorceress Circe. There they find lions and wolves behaving against their nature, as civilized creatures: "These beasts did not attack my men, but stood on their hind legs and wagged their long tails." The men are enticed into the house by Circe's singing and turned into swine. "Grunting, their bodies covered with bristles, they looked just like pigs," we are told, "but their minds were intact."

The *Odyssey* is a book of transformations, and the impression it leaves is of an unfinished world, a world in the making, fluid and open, interacting with the animal kingdom but also the kingdom of death and the kingdom of the gods, and the humans in that world seem unfinished, too, as when Odysseus speaks to his heart and asks it

to beat more slowly, as if the heart were not an intimate part of him but something inhabiting his body, with its own separate will and life.

The great contrast to the *Odyssey*, its antithesis, has to be the Book of Leviticus, a text just as archaic, which is concerned solely with laying down boundaries, establishing categories, defining and identifying the relationship of culture to nature, telling us what things belong together and what things absolutely do not. Thou shalt not let thy cattle gender with a diverse kind, says the Lord, and thou shalt not sow thy field with mingled seed, neither shall a garment mingled of linen and wool come upon thee. It's all about what may be put into the body, and what comes out of the body—the semen of the man, the menstrual blood of the woman: these things are unclean and are to be dealt with by measures accounted for in detail. It's about whom we can have sex with and whom we can't. If the first two books of the Pentateuch, Genesis and Exodus, tell us how the material world was created, Leviticus tells us how the social world was created, a world in which transgression of the categories is no longer possible, or at least is undesirable. The boundaries of man interact on the one hand with the holy and the spiritual, on the other with nature, which man may access only by way of certain relatively simple systems, everything that falls outside those systems being a threat. Any transformation, any transgression, is not only undesirable, not only a source of horror, but of evil; hence the devil figure of folk mythology with the bestial attributes of horns and hooves, hence the witches who turned into cats, the men who turned into wolves, the men who drank blood like animals and did not die.

Popular culture still revels in these archaic transgressions, which in our totally rational universe, where everything down to the smallest atom has been mapped and thereby conquered, no longer present any serious threat and yet remain associated with primeval horror, in that we make use of them for our entertainment—entertainment being nothing but a space in which we can allow ourselves to feel the strongest emotions without obligation. Love, excitement, fright—pretend emotions in a pretend world. As true of fairy tales as of films and computer games. Art belongs in the same realm, it too sets up a pretend world—a painting is not the real world, a photograph is not the real world, a poem is not the real world, all are only representations—its transgressions are not real either, but mere representations of transgression. Nevertheless, art imposes its own obligations, at least if it's worthy of the name, because what art can do is enter into the space where

[Priorities]

A ZOOM WITH A VIEW

From behaviors engaged in by politicians and other government employees around the world during virtual meetings last year.

Removed her shirt and bra during a meeting with her political party, the national bank, and the press about the impact of the novel coronavirus

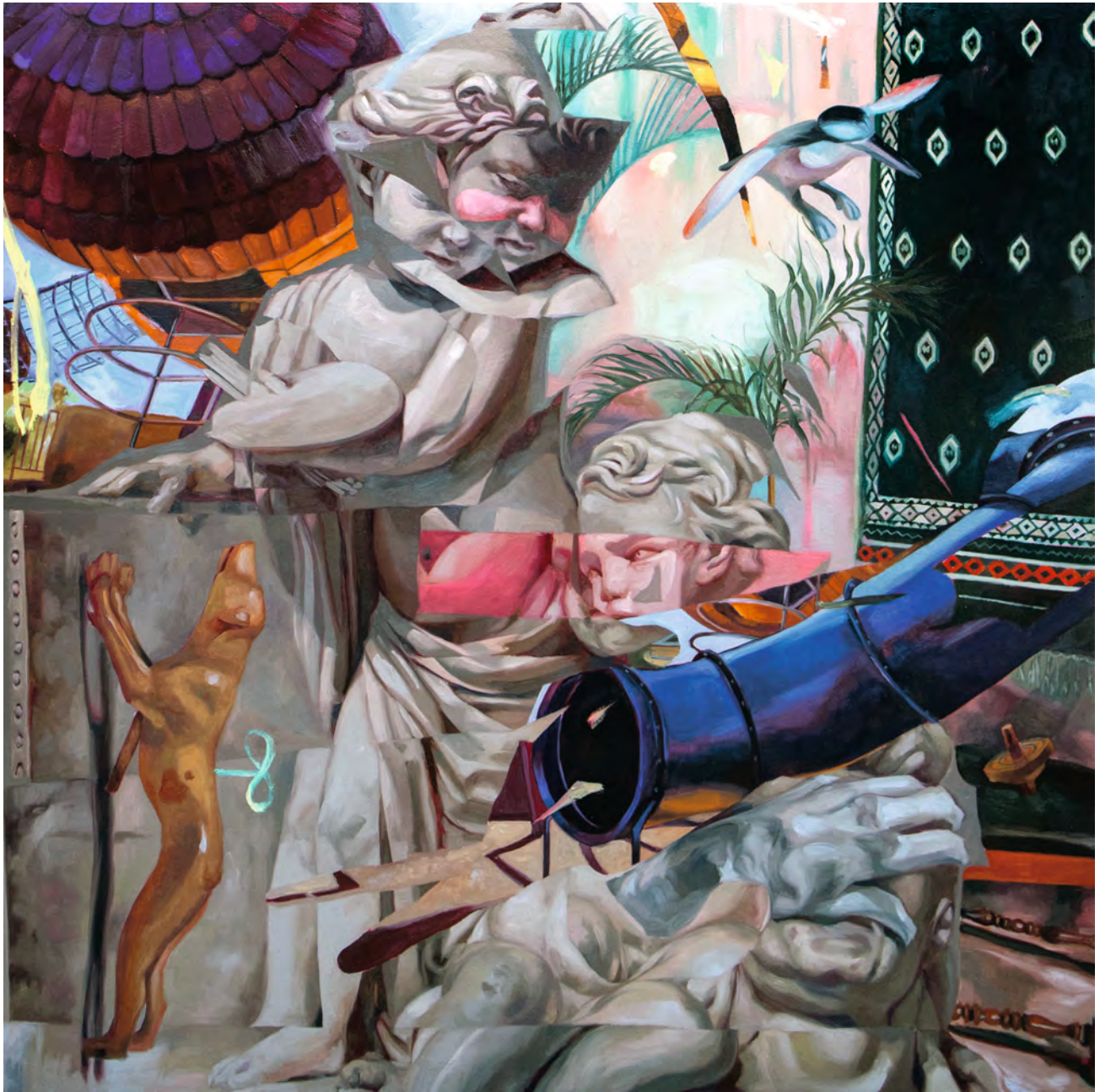
Pulled down his partner's shirt and kissed her breast during a congressional session on social security

Took a shower during a meeting with the president about the impact of the pandemic on the economy

Had sex with the town treasurer during a meeting with regional government officials about combating the spread of the coronavirus

Lay down on a bed in the room and had sex during a city-council meeting about how to feed schoolchildren during the pandemic

Drank a beer, introduced his pet cat to other officials, and threw the cat across the room during a meeting on social distancing



Infantile War, a painting by Valerie Chua Sai, whose work was on view in August at La Lanta Fine Art, in Bangkok.

the world, our world of categories, is established, the very space where its creation occurs, again and again, for every one of us creates our own world and our own identity, however obscurely, this being the task given to us at birth. From the moment we leave the biological darkness and enter the light of the social world, we take it upon ourselves and pursue it, applying ourselves throughout our lives, and then in death we depart, and only the body remains, until it too, devoured by worms and insects, pervaded by bacteria and gases, decomposes and is transformed into soil.

[Hearing]

CATCHER GONE AWRY

From an August 2020 parole hearing for Mark David Chapman, who was sentenced to twenty years to life in prison in 1981 for killing John Lennon. Chapman was denied parole.

COMMISSIONER JOSEPH CRANGLE: After the shooting, sir, did you feel relieved, like you had accomplished what you set out to do?



© THE ARTIST COURTESY FOLEY GALLERY, NEW YORK CITY

Luminograms from the Birdsong series by Mike Jackson, whose work was on view in November at Foley Gallery, in New York City.

MARK CHAPMAN: No, that I did not feel. The opposite happened.

CRANGLE: You didn't flee. You just stood there, and then I know that the doorman took care of the gun, and you just sat there and then opened up *The Catcher in the Rye* and started reading? I don't know how you could have been reading during that moment of such chaos, where an unbelievable man is lying there about thirty feet from you, dead by your actions.

CHAPMAN: Yes.

CRANGLE: Is there a connection with this book in your life?

CHAPMAN: I identified with that character's isolation, loneliness. I got very wrapped up in that book.

CRANGLE: One of the reasons I'm asking is because, as you know, we have your sentencing minutes, okay? Bear with me here. At sentencing, your attorney spoke, and then you had an opportunity to speak. You asked permission from the court to read a passage of *The Catcher in the Rye*. The particular passage that you picked was the following: "Anyway, I keep picturing all of these little kids playing some game in the big field of rye and all. Thousands of little kids and nobody is around—nobody big, I mean—except me. And I'm standing on

the edge of some crazy cliff. What I have to do, I have to catch everybody if they start to go over the cliff. I mean, if they're running and they don't look where they're going I have to come out from somewhere and catch them. That's all I'd do all day. I'd just be the catcher in the rye." Enlighten us. I don't understand why you chose that passage, and why did you do that at sentencing?

CHAPMAN: Well, I think psychologically I look back at it now—and I haven't heard or read that for years—this guy wants to save the world. In my twisted way at that time, in my thinking, I'm not thinking that what I did was good, but I'm thinking, you know, maybe there's something I can do now that's important, and this is my heart. This was my horrible, evil self. Just a way to try to make up for it and trying to say I'm not really a bad person. That's the best explanation that I can give.

CRANGLE: That moment there, the description, a person is saving a little kid from falling off a cliff, right, in the field of the rye?

CHAPMAN: The author is playing in that passage—this guy, he's a confused youth and he's looking for meaning and he has a little sister and he's saying the heck with school, heck with society, the heck with money. What's the important thing here, what do I

do? I don't want to put words in his mouth, but that's what I come away with. He wants to do something above and beyond real life. I'm thinking, Here's this horrible crime. I really at that point can't deal with it, so I make some type of—a totally impractical way of saying this is who I want to be. I want to be someone helpful and that's a messiah complex. You're going to save people and be bigger than life—really you're running away from what's going on inside of you, so you have to create an alternate world to explain why your life is a commonplace, day-to-day, meal-to-meal type of life. That's the best that I can explain it.

CRANGLE: Okay.

CHAPMAN: I don't read the book anymore.

[Account]

POUR DECISIONS

From an October 2020 Instagram post by Keith McNally, the owner of Balthazar, a French brasserie in New York City.

One night at Balthazar, four Wall Street businessmen ordered the restaurant's most expensive red wine: a \$2,000 bottle of Château Mouton Rothschild. One of the two managers transferred the Bordeaux into a decanter at a waiter's station. Simultaneously, a young couple ordered the restaurant's cheapest red wine, an \$18 pinot noir, which they wanted poured into a decanter. These two very different wines were now in identical decanters. Mistaking the \$18 wine for the \$2,000 Rothschild, the first manager poured the cheap wine for the businessmen. According to the manager, the businessman hosting the others considered himself a wine connoisseur, and showing off, tasted the cheap wine before bursting into raptures about its purity.

The young couple, who ordered the \$18 pinot noir, were then inadvertently served the \$2,000 Rothschild. On taking their first sips of what they believed was cheap wine, they jokingly pretended to be drinking an expensive wine and parodied all the mannerisms of a wine snob.

Five minutes later, the two managers discovered their error and, horrified, phoned me at home. I rushed to Balthazar. The businessmen's celebratory mood was clearly enhanced by the wine they had mistakenly thought was the restaurant's

most expensive. This put me in a dilemma: whether to come clean and admit the manager's mistake, or allow them to continue drinking the cheap wine in blissful ignorance. It was unthinkable at this point to pull the real Bordeaux from the young couple's table. Besides, they were having too much fun pretending to be drinking a \$2,000 bottle of wine. I decided to tell both parties the truth. The businessman responded

[Q&A]

PRIZE FIGHTER

From the transcript of a telephone interview with Louise Glück conducted by Adam Smith, chief scientific officer of Nobel Media, after she won the 2020 Nobel Prize in Literature.

LOUISE GLÜCK: Hello?

ADAM SMITH: Good morning, my name is Adam Smith, calling from nobelprize.org. Am I speaking with Louise Glück?

GLÜCK: I really can't do this.

SMITH: I promise it won't be anything onerous.

GLÜCK: I have to have some coffee right now.

SMITH: Could I ask you what the award of the Nobel Prize means to you?

GLÜCK: I have no idea. My first thought was "I won't have any friends" because most of my friends are writers. Of course there are recipients I don't admire. I wanted to buy another house, a house in Vermont, and I thought, "Well, I can buy a house now."

SMITH: It can be an intrusion, all this attention.

GLÜCK: It's disruptive, the phone ringing all the time. It's ringing now, squeaking into my ear.

SMITH: I fully understand. For those who are unfamiliar with your work—

GLÜCK: Many!

SMITH: Would you recommend a place for them to start?

GLÜCK: I would suggest that they not read my first book unless they want to feel contempt.

SMITH: There's so much focus at the moment on the value of lived experience. How important do you think lived experience is to be able to talk about events?

GLÜCK: Oh, heavens. It's barely seven o'clock.

SMITH: But it's so much a feature of your own writing.

GLÜCK: Is the two minutes over?

SMITH: Yes. I'm sorry.

by saying, “I *thought* that wasn’t a Mouton Rothschild!” The others at the table nodded their heads in servile agreement.

[Story]

FEEL AND HOLD

By Diane Williams, from *How High—That High*, a collection of short stories, which will be published this fall by Soho Press.

To get a bit of food, the Rotches went out in the morning. And since the meat at the market didn’t look very appetizing—it wasn’t cut in the same way we cut meat—they chose not to buy any meat.

The hands of the market vendors were much more expressive than our hands—the hands we

have at home. For example, when taking up a piece of merchandise, those vendors’ hands could feel and hold at the same time.

When we hold a thing—I am not so sure we feel it.

And at the market, to make the tea that was provided—there was theater involved!

They’d stuff a cup full with mint, put plenty of sugar on top, and then decant the boiling water from as much as two feet above the cup!

Rotch was—did I already tell you this?—my friend Rotch became quite a problem in the end and he fled to some remote part of the country.

What his wife was after was a life of joviality. Joviality—jewelry?

No matter.

They had no carpet on the floor and their floors were all concrete and they always shook out their shoes before putting them on because scorpions might have been in there, inside of their shoes.

In the afternoon at four o’clock, every day in that country, the rains would come and it would rain for an hour, and we could see that the trees had raindrops on them.

Such satisfactions—how in the world did satisfactions ever get into the world?

At the market, Rotch often spoke to a certain man there about a chronic headache or a nightmare. Mrs. Rotch could not keep it to herself either—her affliction—her petulance. *Let’s get the food!*

It was hard for them to find each other worthy of respect, and Mr. Rotch, I’ve come to think, wanted a reward for his fidelity, which was not forthcoming.

Mrs. Rotch was often seen straight on—against a wall—with her saddle nose pointed skyward, sitting with her hands clasped on her knees.

I should have called on her more often when she lived alone.

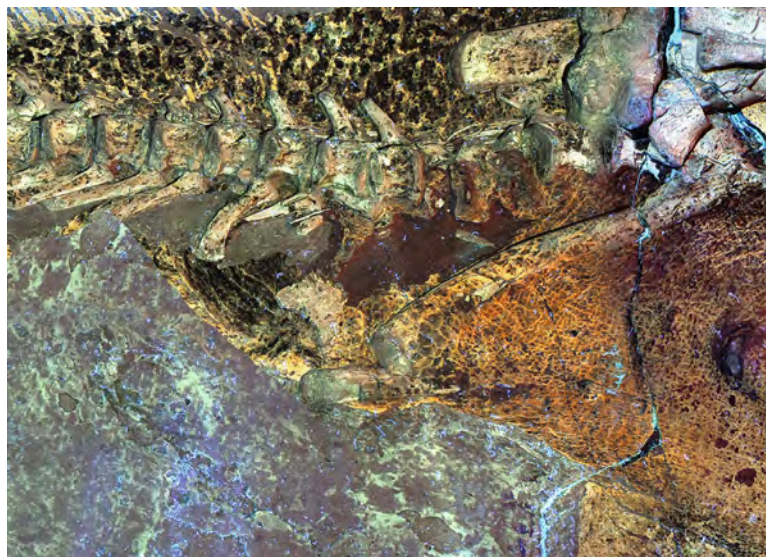
I once tried to pull Mrs. Rotch up onto her feet little by little.

A chair was on its side. A wooden urn had cracked.

I took off her wet clothing. There was a hole in her dress and it was my

[Fossil]

ANALS OF HISTORY



From an image of a dinosaur fossil that was recently discovered in northeastern China. The fossil, described in research published in October on the website *bioRxiv*, is the only known record of a posterior orifice of a dinosaur, and reveals that the *Psittacosaurus* had a cloaca.

fault. I was unable to move her. Later I looked in and she was in the same situation.

Now her heart gets so much assistance from a pacemaker that sometimes I think she is unable to die.

Among her own family she should have been safeguarded. I guessed how things would turn out for her.

I made a small effort. If only she had been utterly absorbing.

There are those who have watched me return from my sojourns, because I am a little homesick, to my native town—that has just about everything—sex, philosophy, politics, and pandemonium.

Here's a custom for you—gawking—and it needn't be heartbreaking.

And even though I am a wispy woman, I believe I have flared up here in Glencoe like a flame—amid my mother, daughter, husband and some friends, and that I cause fretfulness.

[Prix Fixe]

HELL'S KITCHEN

From video reviews posted to Steve1989MREInfo, a YouTube channel on which Steve Thomas evaluates military rations and MREs (meals ready to eat).

CONCENTRATED BEEF FOR BEEF TEA,
SECOND BOER WAR BRITISH EMERGENCY RATION,
1899–1902

It smells like fish food. A smell that says, whatever this is, it's not appetizing. It wafts foul beef. Lacking in flavor. It's so abnormal. It's probably not safe. Like a meat-grain porridge. A lot of fat and cartilage. Whatever this was, it was never great.

CHARMS CANDIES AND WRIGLEY'S P.K. GUM,
U.S. AAF LIFE RAFT RATION, 1945

The candy has a nice, mild cherry flavor and tastes more natural than candy nowadays. A welcome addition for guys who are starving and dehydrated on a life raft. This is the best gum I've ever had.

COOKIE, APPLE BAR, AND COCONUT BAR,
KOREAN WAR ARCTIC 3 U.S. EMERGENCY AIRCRAFT
LANDING SURVIVAL PACKET, 1952

The cookie sucks all the moisture out of my mouth, like chewing on a sponge. The apple bar tastes like garden soil. If you were starving to death, I guess the coconut bar beats wood chips.

CHEESE SPREAD AND MARLBORO CIGARETTES,
U.S. VIETNAM WAR MEAL COMBAT C RATION
SPAGHETTI WITH MEAT SAUCE, 1969

Cheese from the Sixties just doesn't hold up. This has the nastiest smell, and I've smelled some things. It definitely has black mold. That's the last time I open up a cheese spread. My room stinks. I've got to smoke a cigarette to get the smell out. I don't smoke cigarettes, but when I do, they're at least forty-five years old.

PINEAPPLE NUT CAKE,
U.S. MRE HAM AND CHICKEN LOAF, 1984

The cake smells awesome. There's no rancidity to those nuts. The outer surface is glistening and velvety soft and doesn't feel like food. A truly decadent, rare treat. The pineapple is perfect. I wish I had a hundred of these cakes.

[Self-Improvement]

INHALE, EXECUTE

From FM 7-22 Holistic Health and Fitness, a training field manual for soldiers. Each sentence was taken from the 244-page guide, which was revised and republished last October by the U.S. Army.

Use a water filter. Increase consumption of fresh vegetables. Clean the house. Use safe household products. Use the restroom as needed. Use a deck of playing cards. Use darker curtains. Repaint a room a brighter color. Spend more time in nature. Imagine smelling the grass, feeling the wind. Spend several minutes each day reflecting. Free-journal. Philosophical reading can prove beneficial. Take the longest nap possible. Do not nap underneath trucks. Display grief. Demonstrate empathy. Follow a spiritual plan. Understand your relationship to both the transcendent and to other human beings. A script can help. Example: "I will go up to my firing point and assume a firing position. My breathing is calm. I position my weapon inside my shoulder and under my collarbone. I place my body at a slight angle behind my weapon, legs shoulder-width apart with laces in the dirt. My breathing is calm. I look at my target. Breathe in—breathe out. Rear sight aligned. Body relaxed. I load the magazine, place my weapon from safe to semi, and take a deep breath. I align my target and breathe in, exhale, hold, and deliberately, smoothly squeeze the trigger."



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The Mischievous, a painting by Hulda Guzmán, whose work was on view last month at Alexander Berggruen, in New York City.

OMELET, U.S. MRE MENU #4, 2008

It smells awful and looks like something that would insulate a wall. There is absolutely nothing redeeming about the texture or flavor or smell. But add a little bit of salt and salsa verde and it becomes edible. It starts to taste like a real omelet. Good for two bites, then it gets weird again. You would have to be starving.

SOUP, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

RATION PACK TYPE C, 2015

Tastes like vegetable baby food. It's pretty good.

REINDEER STEW, NORWEGIAN ARCTIC

FIELD RATION GAME CASSEROLE, 2016

Look at this piece of reindeer. Creamy potato and carrot. It's like a light gravy, but also like a stuffing with a gravy base. The reindeer is gamy, such a distinct flavor. It is wholesome and filling. I can't stop eating it. The Norwegians hit it out of the park again.

PEPPERONI PIZZA SLICE, U.S. MRE MENU #23, 2018

The holy grail of all MREs, pepperoni pizza. With thirty years of development, Natick Labs has corrected the issues with shelf stability. Early versions had moisture, oxygen, and pH issues that would produce mold before the three-year inspection. This, however, is better than some frozen pizza out there. This is a special mozza-

rella. Little pieces of pepperoni. Great texture—can't tell if it's pork or beef. A little savory, not overly dry. In 2017, there were issues with this pizza and they shelved the project. The government didn't want to give soldiers brown pizza. The pizza is supposed to boost morale, not decrease it. Soldiers have been asking for it since the birth of the MRE, back in 1981. It was folklore. They couldn't pull it off. Now it's no longer a rumor.

[Interrogation]

THE PUPPET MASTER

From a deposition of Ghislaine Maxwell taken in April 2016 by attorneys for Virginia Giuffrè, who alleges that Maxwell recruited her and other underage girls as part of a sex-trafficking operation she ran with the financier Jeffrey Epstein. Maxwell was arrested by the Federal Bureau of Investigation on multiple charges in July 2020. Her trial is set for later this year. The transcript was released in October.

SIGRID McCAWLEY: Were you ever in a room where there was a puppet?

GHISLAINE MAXWELL: Can you be more specific, whatever you are asking me?

McCawley: Were you ever in a room in New York in Jeffrey Epstein's home where there was a puppet?

MAXWELL: What sort of puppet?

McCawley: Any kind of puppet.

MAXWELL: You need to be more descriptive. I don't know what you mean by puppet—there are hand puppets, all sorts of puppets.

McCawley: Is there any puppet you've ever seen in Jeffrey Epstein's home?

MAXWELL: Again, puppet, you know, there are lots of types of puppets.

McCawley: Any type of puppet.

MAXWELL: If you want to give me a description of the puppet, I would perhaps be able to say.

McCawley: Any type of puppet?

MAXWELL: Can you be more detailed? My understanding of a puppet is a small handheld item you have in a circus. I have never seen that.

McCawley: Have you ever seen a puppet, which is defined as a movable model of a person or animal that is used in entertainment and typically moved either by strings or controlled from above or by a hand inside it?

MAXWELL: I have not seen a puppet that fits exactly that description.

McCawley: Have you seen any puppet that fits any description?

MAXWELL: Can you re-ask the question, please?

McCawley: Yes. Have you seen any puppet that fits any description?

MAXWELL: I am not aware of any small handheld puppets. There was a—I don't know how would you describe it really—a caricature.

McCawley: Did you put the hand of that caricature on [Redacted]'s breast?

MAXWELL: I recollect the puppet.

[Revelation]

FRESCA AND BRIMSTONE

From a sermon given in July 2020 by John MacArthur, the minister at Grace Community Church, a megachurch in Sun Valley, California. The church had a coronavirus outbreak in October.

We are salt and light in the world. That doesn't mean we're going to be accepted by the

world—we understand that. Salvation in Christ transforms us from being part of the decaying, corrupt, diseased world. We become salt. We're transformed from being part of the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light. We are living influences in the world, we're the only hope. Sinners have no hope but the church. No virus should stop us.

What about salt? The Greeks used to call salt divine. In ancient times, couples carried salt to their weddings. The Romans used to say nothing is more valuable than sun and salt. In Germany, brides' shoes once were sprinkled with salt. Covenants were made with salt. I read about a caravan of forty thousand camels—that's a lot of camels—carrying salt across the Sahara. That's how important salt was. Wars were fought over salt. Salt is significant.

We are in the world in the sense of salt, the way salt has been used throughout all of human history, to preserve something from corruption. The church is the only preservative in society.

[Poem]

FR**DOM

By Erica Hunt, from Jump the Clock: New and Selected Poems, which was published in November by Nightboat Books.

ignites in me plenitude
that scents rain. Sense
the sky is full of surprising
music. Timpani, trumpet

a blue tent torn that orders
cogent, cumulative event in which no false intonation
claims itself king

over all. Every last woman
man, and child proof the rain falls
never to be worn out

Freedom is the breaking point beyond rage
I'm not scared and I don't care where the dream
undertakers have warned me not
to take too much, not to
love too much, not to look too closely at the past,
What could there be left to break?

Nothing left to be broken
Nothing left to be taken.

We have to be rubbed into the world. That is to say we have to mingle. Even salt has to dissolve to do its work. The whole world is like a rotting, putrefying, relentlessly deteriorating carcass, and we're the only moral, spiritual disinfectant. We must influence the world and not be influenced by it.

Through all the history of God's redemptive work in the world, civil rulers have worked against God's people, have sought to overrule God, to abuse their sphere of power by stepping into God's kingdom and trying to take authority. We were told millions were going to die. It was just sensible and rational to be protective. As time went on, however, we found out the virus was not as deadly as predicted. And the commands not to assemble didn't apply to protesters and rioters; and little by little, Sunday by Sunday, you kept coming back. We didn't send out an order—you just kept showing up. The first two weeks I preached to no one. I preached to

Patricia, which is pretty routine for me. But by the third week, all of a sudden there were people here, and the fourth week and the next week; and here we are. You kept coming back.

Why not sooner? Predictions of death. Why now? Aren't we putting people in danger? The real danger in this world is spiritual, isn't it? By the way, alcohol kills three million people a year, and all the liquor stores were open. I know they were open because I couldn't get any Fresca, and when I wanted to get Fresca, you know what I was told? That all the aluminum was eaten up by beer cans. Fact. Because the bars aren't open, the beer producers are taking all the aluminum. *I want my Fresca.*

[Solutions]

SCORCHED EARTH POLICIES

From geoengineering projects proposed by researchers between 2012 and 2020 to prevent or mitigate the impact of climate change.

Plant trees
Grow waxier plants
Paint roofs, roads, sidewalks, and buildings white
Spread tiny glass beads over polar sea ice
Cover ice with artificial snow
Cover ice in fleece blankets
Cover buildings in algae
Cover deserts in tarps
Flood Death Valley
Build giant pumps to refreeze the ice
Build large carbon-sucking fans
Build a miles-long sea wall around New York City
Build artificial soil mounds to prop up glaciers
Fertilize the ocean with iron
Spray sulfate aerosols into the atmosphere
Remove cirrus clouds from the atmosphere
Create new heat-trapping clouds
Send a giant parasol into orbit
Spray cloud-thickening sea salt into the air
Spray diamond dust into the atmosphere
Spray human ashes into the atmosphere
Feed Maalox to cattle

[Fiction]

THE FAIRGROUND

By Dorte Nors, from Wild Swims, a collection of short stories, which will be published next month by Graywolf Press. Translated from the Danish by Misha Hoekstra.

There's a stubble field in front of the rental house. Over by the side of the small wood is the country fairground, trampled and singed. A fox might make its rounds there, but otherwise it's deserted. Her bare feet are stuffed into the clogs she found in the closet. Both fairground and field have been baking all day in the late-summer sun. It's September now, and when she walks around the field, the stubble scratches her ankles. But now she's standing still, in her trench coat and clogs. The moon's on the rise, too.

She thinks a lot about what she did to deserve his silence, which tempted her to assume things that weren't true. And then came the rejection. She'd grown panicky and he'd become cynical, she thinks, gazing across the field to the fairground. They must have had a tombola there, maybe a merry-go-round and a roller coaster.

For a time he'd been everything; she supposes it was a kind of obsession. Whatever he did, and even what he thought, haunted her. She read signs in offhand remarks, she researched his past, his possible sorrows. One evening she hid behind the beer taps at a party because his best friend had come through the door and looked at her. That face, as horribly unpleasant as foil between one's teeth, was impossible to ignore, and she'd hidden behind the kegs. There was a sweet



Still Life with Breast Pump, a mixed-media artwork by Alison Elizabeth Taylor, whose work will be on view in September at James Cohan, in New York City.

smell of warm grass and public opinion, and it felt as if she were spinning slightly. Like a suckling pig, she thought. Well spitted, and with an apple jammed in her jaws.

It's September, and she's driven down from the city to the rental. She knows something strange has taken up residence in her. It's something she's known a long time, but the silence gives her no peace. She takes walks along the slopes that drop to the sea, trying to enjoy the sight of cormorants on gillnetting stakes, then heads home to drink tea. The idyllic surroundings provide no relief. On the far side of the stubble field and the wood, the fair-ground draws her eye. There's a special light over there. The wind raises dust from the field; everyone left the site back in June. The grounds lie there awaiting next year's fair, and such emptiness calls for *something*.

I must have been sick, she thinks. The thought occurs to her now and then, even though it was a

case of love, just not the love she'd been promised as a child. Back then, she'd imagined that love was just like running through a sprinkler. It tickled, you laughed and felt silly and beautiful at the same time. You were charming and adorable and wove flowers in the wire mesh of the rabbit hutch and won praise for it. No matter what you did, the chosen one would think you were amazing. The happiness was as sweet as peppermint, and it endured. You were extraordinarily dear, and it was the other person's job to make sure everything ended well by not being able to resist the sweetness.

But what she'd been through as an adult belonged to another world. If it wasn't reluctant, then it was dramatic, and in the end the drama became encysted in her. Kept hidden from the world's light, it wreaked havoc, and at some point she convinced herself that it was because he needed love that she had such a great store of it. Yet for him it was merely a flirtation, a

matter of discharge, nothing more, she understood that now, and it was actually risky of him. A spark and a merciless drought can set a continent ablaze. He ought to know that. Just take Australia, where civil-defense crews wait on tenterhooks in choppers with fat water tanks slung beneath their bellies, anxious and virile, always ready to fly out and stop the craziness from spreading, and now here she stands.

Over at the fairground, the fox prowls at night. It must, for there are always mice in the grass. In the patch where the beer tent stood in June, the ground is pounded down, and when she walks over, she can still catch a whiff of stale beer, and then she sees the rental on the far side of the stubble field. There it squats, reduced to its essence of walls and whitewash. That's the place I'm renting, she thinks. From there I can see everything plainly, yet the house says nothing to her. She walks back to it and gazes out toward the fairground. There the mood feels familiar. Maybe it's the empty lot's defenselessness, she doesn't know, but late one night at a party she'd pressed him into a corner. She'd said that they could always be friends. "Friends?" he'd said. "So you want us to be friends?" He didn't say anything else before going out into the hallway and putting on his winter coat, it was snowing, she could see that when he opened the door. Afterward, she thought that he could just as well have said, "Burn in hell," and then she was slowly revolving, trussed up with hooks, while down at her feet a little motor kindly saw to her rotation. Beneath her, the lawn and the beer tent atmosphere. The kids frolicking through the fairground, coltish

and clueless, and behind them the wood with its dark chill.

We put flowers in the wire mesh around the rabbits we exhibited behind the fairground, she recalls. We decorated our doll carriages with sweet william, roses, whatever else we could swipe from our mothers' flower beds. Then we paraded through the village and out to the fairground. What were we, six, seven, eight, in our prettiest dresses, and the grown-ups applauded, some of them on the point of tears. A woman and love, she thinks, and it feels honeyed on the tongue, and she stands at the edge of the stubble and spits. She looks across to the fairground, spitting. The fairground interests her more than the walks above the shore, the cormorants, the beech forest, and it dawns on her that while it lasted, she was really two people at the same time. One who was as if possessed by love, and one who walked alongside, silent and observing, and sometimes the two would have arguments that the observer always lost, because love bears all things, endures all things, but if I have not love, the lover screamed, I am clanging brass, a sounding cymbal, and the observer made a mental note that horror vacui might be what gets the country's church bells to ring.

A stray ice cream wrapper, over there on the lot, and now a ringdove worming its way through the grass. Empty, she thinks, and I who am so full of things. My doll carriage was pigeon-blue, and I decorated it with daisies. We started at the school, and then we marched in procession to the fairground. It smelled of barbecue and dry grass. The parents and teachers ran after us with their cameras, while the boys from school stayed away. I wonder where they were, the boys, as we walked there, a model of compliance. Were they playing soccer, or throwing abandoned bikes into the creek?

She cocks an ear to the evening sky, listening. No boys in the bushes. No boys at the fairground, they're gone, and she tries to make herself taller in order to see it more clearly. The fox is not there, and it's good that the ringdove flies off, for now she is standing on the brink. It's September. In the yard hang apples and black elderberries. Someone's placed a good chair under the chestnut, she could just sit down, but she'd rather stand here with the gas can. It's so quiet, now that everyone's gone home.

[Food Criticism]

SUTRA SCROLL TIE NOODLES

By Ryozui Ryosen, a fourteenth-century Japanese Zen monk. The poem is the first recorded mention of ramen in Japan and was deciphered last year by Hajime Yoshizawa, an associate professor at Meisei University, in Tokyo. The Daizo sutra is a compilation of Buddhist writings consisting of 5,048 scrolls. Translated from the classical Chinese by Hajime Yoshizawa and Robert Chapeskie.

Bodies prone and heads unflinching under the rod,
look at them stretched flat. How marvelous!
These ties of the five thousand scrolls will unravel in my empty belly;
out the Daizo sutra's words will flow, and settle there inside me.



Photographs by Joseph Rodriguez, taken from his cab while working as a taxi driver in New York City in the Seventies and Eighties. From *Taxi*, which was published last month by powerHouse Books.