

Paeon to Bicillin L-A® and the End of Harry Barlow's Rhesus Monkey Experiments

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[But] thanks to Harlow and his colleagues in the study of attachment, we have been humanized—we possess an entire science of touch, and some of this came from cruelty. There's the paradox.

—Lauren Slater, "Monkey love," *The Boston Globe*, 21 March 2004.

Fascism is not our future—it cannot be; we cannot allow it to be so—but this is surely the way fascism can begin.

—David Remnick, on Donald Trump, "An American Tragedy," *The New Yorker*, 9 November 2016

I was in Harry Harlow's "Pit of Despair," that walled isolation chamber with a one-way mirror: spent months there, rocking like a horse turned wooden by the blank stare of a mute whisperer into part of an attic's unaccounted boneyard. I do know how it feels to suckle at a wire mother, because a tin mom's teleprompter was the script given me by captors whose transgenic faces tarred my raptor-feathered fight. Isolation, that velvet rope of triage that cannot be deveined, spelled out America's subliminal apartheid like a bride's soft skin that lives within her hardened marriage.

I started off homebound, a leitmotif of the Mandela Effect, once a latchkey kid, keyed up in the collective amygdala,

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then gently cordoned off the way a capsized crew
is threaded off from where they tread together
until one of them goes lost. Later, I was rigid as the monkey
huddled in a corner, egg-eyed like the tempest
of an anthropomorphic psychosis that society sections away.
That monkey's mutagenic life became the DNA of
all human cruelty. I pined for touch
while the chemical cartel nudged me with its ammonia
waves, and even now, I cry for the word *felt*.

Felt mother, how I longed to *feel* mothered.
I sensed my ancestors near as I was dying there,
on a cold bathroom floor. My mother had abandoned me, in
such inoculating heat from Tuskegee. Experimental machinations
pushed my hem to the heavens. *What you done
in the dark sure come to the light*. Blighted
starlight through the tiny window I could
not stand up to reach. Like a hunchback child
kept in a four-foot-high basement, or the muteness
pounded by a venal gavel into the mouth of each woman
whose abuse is denied, I was just too weak to speak.

The miscreant who put monkeys on "rape racks"
taught us motherly touch was broader than milking
at a celestial maw, our similarly Simian DNA a common tree
of Syngenta and Ciba-Geigy, borne of Swiss notions of
neutrality plunked proximal to our maddened Germany.
Ciba first pigmented clothes, making arsenic Green,
so before this nothing was unbleached, before Harlow our
cloth mothers sewed a flowery sack-dress from flour.
Grandma said simply, *You wore what you had*,
as young Harlow in Iowa sketched winged creatures in his
imaginary land Yazoo, then vivisected them violently with lines.

Flat latitudes, we noted of the echolocating expanse, were
seamed with unreachable simplicity. *It may be that proximity
is all that you know of love* Harlow chided.
So, we courted collision, divisibly Midwestern, depressed
from Atrazine, our stewed Prairie Madness

soon calcified in milk teats, metastasizing into brains in my
unassuming block, spiralizing the DNA of cornstalks
that is more complicated than human or monkey. Corn has
the genome of not running away, a racked realism.
Because, says science, corn *has* to stay put.
I thank God I have not been so deprived.

Outside the gallows of cloth pelts, the spiralized germs
climbed the collective neck as a borrelia spirochete
that started the neurological twitch, idea-like, behind my eye.
History is limited by the lexicographer's sty
so that pure experience and the sailor's cure
are as unreachable as Oscar Wilde's fainting chair
from which the pulse of a syphilitic miasm
propelled this theatrical democracy
into costumed Darwinian eugenics.
Project Paperclip fastened us all to pathogens
from which Peoria Lab Penicillin would set us free.

Raunchy beats led me to Peoria, my sister and I
two of few white girls at a funk concert there.
We danced where the Missouri and Mighty Mississippi met
to dump pesticides into a cancer cluster that later struck her.
Penicillin was first made on corn-steep liquid from local farms there
so that by D-Day, troops had their shots, a wonder drug
for Wunderkind. Farmers, invested in the wartime cog,
and proud of their penicillium corn, bought nitrogen
from bombs, and DDT for their crops.
Now, like a trial-by-drowning witch, I only
Have that *Get-Down-On-It* twitch

Like the high whine of pride and its insecticide.
The cremains of my life's gyrations shaken down
from a statue of a life. My sister once said I could be zebra
and she would be monkey,
iconoclast to her monkey mind,
I was that dialect from exile, body-dialectical, before
my sister lost her breast
then-incommunicado to my illness,

our girlhood shirked in shucked husk dolls. An
Axis Mundi of Atrazine and Paxil, she replied tersely,
stole her flesh, while she regulated earth and euphoria.

Now I take my penicillin shot for neuro Lyme
riddled by the neurotoxic moonshine
that flows as free as cornstalks marching quietly
around my GMO-laced city, Mitsubishi's first electric car town
near where Mad Hatter rage from Lincoln's Blue Mass pills
spit out a blue planet like a lead plug
to house milliners who would never be millionaires
and the myoclonic start of beggar's subways
below the green peace of death, with an
iron-on ideology and one ribald eyeball
staring out of a Masonic dollar.

Zebra melts into my ashen face, a grayed area
Found on Google cartography,
medicine's improbable diagnosis defying Occam.
Sprayed skies collapsing into New Games parachutes, as
my mailman's detergent conjuring Zyklon B
deeply sickens me. I haven't seen anyone in weeks.
They call this limbic kindling, as in
It Only Takes a Spark To Get a Fire Going,
our Sunday School song about giving away God,
as if diluted sameness that should end already,
will shake the exoplasmic ego away.

Children of Lyme, Connecticut don't look like teetotalers
now, but Van Gogh when the night got in his brain.
Their hyperacuity threatens national security.
The flight pattern of Plum Island birds ends
around swingsets that carved smiles in the afternoon air.
It's crayon biowarfare, those poor little monkeys,
where Nancy Lanza counts yard-roaming deer before, before,
every evening before, the *Ixodes* ticks on crisp Newtown grass,
Dr. Charles Jones defends himself to the Medical Boards, as
the FDA rations antibiotics like curative mold withheld
from poor black men of Tuskegee.

The poor black men of Tuskegee
were reduced to symbols of the disease process
of white supremacy that fanned out quietly
through the tumorous nurseries
and tumorous suburbs and tumorous
white flight exploding into a hyper-white
aircraft that sprayed a sick mist
over my friend's land and drove her into
a temporal seizure that started with the A-bomb
researcher in Michigan feeding her radiation as a child
when she was Human Subject Number 423.

The cure was this paean to Bicillin, raunchy mold on corn steep.
Proxemics, Josie, I say, watching a video
where the cheerleader near Peoria huddles
with a cursing Dad under her home as
an EF₄ pulverizes it. He shouts *nails*
or other fright-words, flushing her from the timid hole—
their dream kitchen dashed to smithereens.
She's shrilling *Omigod Omigod* our demigoddess Dorothy,
past an untouched, illusory large-screen TV, insulation
draped like *congratulations* streamers, staircase freestanding
on grass, Dad's "Holy shit" as shocked prayer, there in Washington,

Where our Vorticist was a Fascist, what Plath
said every woman adores: making luminous literata into
imagistes, as if overexposed "children of the sun,"
their deepest palimpsest undone. Feminist confessionals became
ovens, before "It Gets Better," oh lyrical Lymie Heather,
her "It Gets Better" speech stopped when she flung herself before a train.
The SS Entomological Institute's
paranoid pesticides preventing tick warfare, then
all of it hatching into the same symbolic nymph.
Recombining in John Deere combines trolling once-swamped
malarial fields: this gathered, hard-fracked hem.

Now the hymn-drum of stimming Indigo kids
where Brucella-laced bison roam Standing Rock,

where Grandma succumbed to the Rorschach plaques,
where Solar Civilizations still solicit sundown towns,
where Flint is the garbage fire going.
Who is the Vorticist-Fascist? We can't
de-cipher this spin. *It's bad, Josie*, says Dad,
to his post-Apocalyptic, just another day.
Josie, come on now. I know it's scary, come on now.
Josie, we gotta get outside where it's safe.
Our house is freakin' destroyed.

She climbs from the smashed dollhouse to the
Russian Doll Cocktail, with the Mighty Mississippi
oxbowing to nearby Nauvoo, harkening proximity
to these tainted morphologies of mergers through history:
she tilts toward the windmilled chem-sky, toward the
histo-soil, as insect people emerge seeking
palliative, chimeric saliency. Like sweet Josie,
I cling to what stings me. What is kindled—
here to Ferguson, stone's throw from Monsanto—
becomes counterforce's carburetor, body heat
to calibrate the missile. Dad's right, Josie: *get your back up off the wall.*

Proximity could grow love, that steep of mutual
contamination, a flanking then fucking then
fomenting at the field's end, where medicine molts
just as the Monarch molts: the crowning crown
begins anew, but we crawl up toward a vestigial,
surrogate sense, the sensitive's Mensa, where still
artists with paresis claw toward the blinding blue.
Otherwise, madness and its cure become the felted
lovers sinking into oxytocin dreams, until
our brains are completely overrun, and
we can only remember the invention.

Notes for "Paeon to Bicillin L-A[®] and the End of Harry Harlow's Rhesus Monkey Experiments"

My story weaves into this larger story. I contracted sudden-onset, disabling myalgic encephalomyelitis (ME/CFS) in 1992, then secondary multiple chemical

sensitivities (MCS), and then Lyme disease plus associated co-infections after 2004, which became persistent and nearly deadly due to my lack of immunity. At the end of 2008, after an Infectious Disease Society of America (IDSA) doctor refused my positive blood tests for these infections and denied me intravenous antibiotics, emboldened by the “Lyme Wars” and the IDSA’s official stance against the chronicity of Lyme disease, I was abandoned to die in the corner of a bedroom and adjoining bath at my house, largely without care when I could not crawl beyond a few feet and had to live within tiny parameters of a room’s corner and adjoining bathroom—like a Harlow monkey isolation experiment—for over 7 months, immobilized, ultimately dependent on a noninvasive BiPap ventilator to breathe, unable to bathe or speak out loud, mostly without human contact and scarce media for twenty-four hours a day. In the United States, 79 to 90% of personal assistance for disabled adults is provided voluntarily by families and friends, due to lack of available services that vary state by state, leaving people to fall through the cracks (National Center on Elder Abuse, 2012).

ME/CFS is characterized, as the Institute of Medicine (2015) describes it, by a slew of multi-systemic “symptoms that are made worse by exertion of any sort,” even mild stimulation, often referred to as “post-exertional malaise,” or PEM (p. 1). Functional impairment is extreme, to the point that a small task like talking, reading, or brushing one’s teeth can be more than a patient can do in a day. Other trivial activities can cause a “crash” that lasts for months or years or leaves a patient permanently bedridden, needing to reduce all stimulation. As one patient described in the Institute of Medicine (2015) report guide for clinicians, “Beyond Myalgic Encephalomyelitis/Chronic Fatigue Syndrome: Redefining An Illness,” “My personal experience of having ME/CFS feels like permanently having the flu, a hangover, and jet lag while being continually electrocuted (which means that pain plays at least as much of a role in my condition as fatigue)” (p. 6). “There is sufficient evidence that PEM is a primary feature that helps distinguish ME/CFS (SEID) from other conditions” (Institute of Medicine, 2015, p. 5).

Harry Harlow conducted studies on maternal deprivation in rhesus monkeys; often bizarre and sadistic, they expanded the science of touch—some involved the comparison between monkeys raised by cloth “mothers” and those raised by wire “mothers,” some involved what amounted to solitary confinement and torture. As Lauren Slater wrote in “Monkey Love,” “Here is where he stepped from science into fairy tales. He made many of the iron maidens: Some rattled their children and stabbed them. No matter what the torture, Harlow observed, the babies would not let go. There is no partial reinforcement to explain this behavior; there

is only the dark side of touch, the reality of primate relationships, which is that mothers can kill us even as they hold us." Also, "Harlow, a brash man who could also be strangely shy, said, 'It may be that proximity is all you know of love—I thank God I have not been so deprived'" (Slater, 2004).

The Mandela Effect is when people collectively remember something in a way that didn't happen, such as people thinking Nelson Mandela died in prison in the 1980s when he passed away in 2013. "Russian Doll Cocktail" or "Russian Biological Cocktail" refers to the use of simultaneous chemical and biological agents, often in rapid and complex succession, to make finding the cause of illness from these agents exceedingly difficult. Plum Island was a zoonotic (animal to human disease) biowarfare lab off the coast of Long Island that produced biological agents often blamed on the outbreak of Lyme disease in Lyme, CT, and elsewhere on the East Coast—which since shifted its operations to Kansas (Carroll, 2004). Via Kris Newby's (2019) book *Bitten*, I learned after this poem was written that Willy Burgdorfer (credited with the discovery that *Borrelia burgdorferi* causes Lyme disease) stated that he thought early US Lyme outbreaks were caused by a biological weapons release, and I discovered that Burgdorfer's most influential advisor was Rudolf Geigy of the J. R. Geigy AG chemical company in Basel, where Burgdorfer launched his tick-focused career, which later merged into Ciba-Geigy.

Swiss chemical company Ciba-Geigy merged with Sandoz in 1996 to form Novartis. Ciba-Geigy has manufactured many products, including antibiotics (Cipro, Rifampin, Amoxicillin, etc.), but also produced Atrazine (Herbert, 1997). Zyklon B was a pesticide created by the German chemical and pharmaceutical cartel IG Farben, which Ciba-Geigy modeled itself after, used by the Nazi's in gas chambers in WWII (the Nazis also killed tens of thousands of disabled and chronically ill citizens via Aktion T4, first using extreme neglect and starvation, then "advancing" to the more expedient gas chamber that served as a prototype for larger models). "In order to remain competitive with the Germans, the three largest Swiss chemical companies, Ciba Ltd., J.R. Geigy S.A., and Sandoz Ltd., formed a similar cartel called Basle AG. This trust lasted from 1918 to 1951. By 1970, however, market conditions led Ciba and Geigy to merge, forming one of the world's leading pharmaceutical and specialty chemical companies" ("Ciba-Geigy Ltd. History," n.d.). Basle was originally a leader in the dye industry, and early dyes were often based on arsenical pigments, with elements originally used as pesticides or drugs. Syngenta was formed out of the Novartis merger, and produces agricultural chemicals and GMO seeds ("Ciba-Geigy Ltd. History, n.d.).

The first mass quantities of penicillin were made during WWII at the Peoria Lab in Peoria, IL (USDA, 2018).

What you done in the dark sure come to the light, intoned nurse Eunice Rivers, repeating a patient in the Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment, which involved non-consensually exploiting poor Black men by withholding available penicillin treatments for syphilis to observe the disease's progression of brutal, protracted, and long-suffering symptoms (Hayden, 2003). Doctors prescribing antibiotics for Lyme disease in recent years have repeatedly faced the threat of losing their licenses for treating patients by the International Lyme and Associated Diseases Society guidelines, versus the antibiotic-restricting Infectious Disease Society of America guidelines. The single drug pending approval for ME/CFS, Ampligen, has also been held up by decades of red tape in the FDA, so patients cannot get it.

The Vorticist is Ezra Pound, who coined the pre-WWI term for art and poetry, including his own. He described poetic Vorticism as locating both movement and stillness within an image and incorporating history and ancestry. As he wrote,

All experience rushes into this vortex. All the energized past, all the past that is living and worthy to live. All MOMENTUM, which is the past bearing upon us, RACE, RACE-MEMORY, instinct charging the PLACID,

NON-ENERGIZED

FUTURE.

The DESIGN of the future in the grip of the human vortex. All the past that is vital, all the past that is capable of living into the future, is pregnant in the vortex, NOW.

(Pound, 1914/2010).

Pound was locked up for twelve years at St. Elizabeth's Hospital, which overlooked Washington, DC, for his fascist beliefs. He also famously dubbed the bisexual, Freud-challenging poet H. D. an "Imagiste," or a proponent of his school of "imagism" that focused on "luminous details," but flattening her own complex poetry to a pretty trinket, though he also referred to her work in his essay on Vorticism. This poem in many ways reclaims a neo-Vorticism to transform it.

The Atomic Energy Commission and Department of Energy (in the 1990s) declassified information on the non-consenting human subjects used for radiation experiments in prior decades noted in this poem. The personal stories I have heard of people living through this, as well as related government programs like MKUltra, have convinced

me to trust the first-hand reports. (See “DOE Openness: Human Radiation Experiments,” <https://ehss.energy.gov/OHRE/index.html>.)

Sandra Steingraber’s documentary film *Living Downstream* is referenced. It deals with Atrazine contamination, focusing on Central Illinois, particularly areas near Peoria, less than an hour from my hometown. Around when she went to college in my hometown twin cities of Bloomington-Normal, IL, and was diagnosed with cancer, Mitsubishi decided to place a welcomed auto plant outside of my town, later launching an advertising campaign called “The New Normal,” which depicted electric cars zipping around Normal, IL—a sign of a green revolution in an agriculture-heavy area. In my childhood home in Normal, in the 1990s, my sister measured above-EPA-safe levels of triazene herbicides—a class that contains Atrazine—in the tap water we had ingested throughout our early years, and then later developed breast cancer. The commonly prescribed antidepressant Paxil is also now implicated in breast cancer cases as a potential endocrine disruptor, which in this case brings up the idea of chemical synergy (where two chemical agents can far more than double the toxic effects of the original agent) (Healy, 2014).

Nancy Lanza lived in one of the most deer-populated, Lyme-endemic areas of the country (deer carry and spread Lyme ticks)—before she was murdered by her son I’ll call “AL,” as did subsequent reports, who went on to commit horrific mass murder at Sandy Hook Elementary School. Pleas to state offices to examine AL’s brain for Lyme or tick-borne co-infections did not result in a comprehensive analysis of his blood and brain tissue for tick-borne illness. Dr. Robert Bransfield has extensively researched and spoken about the links between *a small subset* of late-stage Lyme patients and violence induced in part by direct brain infection and inflammation (violent or combative behavior can happen in other brain infection as well), including in very rare cases homicidal violence, yet Lyme treatment remains controversial due to the efforts of the Infectious Disease Society of America, which openly debunks the notion of chronic Lyme disease and long-term antibiotic therapies in most cases. Dr. Charles Jones spent years fighting medical boards in Connecticut in a prohibitively expensive legal battle because of the “crime” of prescribing antibiotics to children with Lyme disease. (“Be Safe Newtown,” n.d.).

The cure for syphilis, still a common treatment for neurological Lyme, was injections of penicillin, now Bicillin LA. Both syphilis and Lyme disease are caused by spirochetes, and called at different points in history “the great imitators” because of their breadth of symptoms that can resemble other diseases (Lyme spirochetes have also been found in the brains of Alzheimer’s disease patients).

“Children of the Sun” is a term used by Julius Evola, a Nazi-affiliated philosopher and

darling of the Italian fascists who is openly admired by Steve Bannon and members of the US “alt-right.” He uses the term to describe a reawakening “white race.” This group calls itself the Solar Civilization, making it sound like a green business instead of a racist cult. “Sunset towns” were historically all-white towns, cities, or neighborhoods that practiced segregation via shutting out people of other races “once the sun went down,” through direct laws, signs at the town limits, violence, or intimidation tactics.

Heather Askeland Johnson, my thirty-three-year old poet friend, suffered severe neurological Lyme disease, fought tirelessly to get treatments she ultimately couldn’t afford or access, and in deterioration and despair took her own life in 2014, after posting an “It Gets Better” video to encourage bullied youth not to commit suicide.

The quotes of Josie and her dad are taken from a video posted on YouTube by Marc Wells (2013) after he and his daughter bravely went through a devastating tornado on November 17, 2013, in Washington, IL, just outside of Peoria.

“Recombining in John Deere combines” references “recombination” —the combining of viral or other genetic material in a cell that can create new pathogenic agents. The concept of “indigo children” from Nancy Tappe in the 1960s and 1970s characterized certain gifted, highly perceptive children, who also may have symptoms of ADD, ADHD, or autism spectrum.

“Get down on it” and “get your back up off the wall” are from legendary funk band Kool and the Gang, who my sister and I saw in Peoria around 1984 or 1985. “Will it play in Peoria?” was a term popularized in the Vaudeville era, when Peoria, IL, became the litmus test of what “Middle America” (and then, the rest of America) would think.

Acknowledgements

For my two favorite poets lost to these illnesses, Heather (Askeland) Johnson (who passed away in 2014 at age 33) and Nicole Meredith Reinert (who passed away in 2016 at age 40).

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