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Quarantine Notebook

WEEK 6 • 3RD May 2020

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MUSCALIET

RED MONDAY

Wash your hands of them
 those shorting the DOW
 those that shill Bitcoin
 those puking it out.
 I see them sneaking

in the dark, drinking from darker
 toilets reminds me of a time
 when gutters were the road & air
 & an 'exchange' meant 'bread' for 'cow'.
 Tonight's ejection of bowels, red,
 comes the sell-off, a dead cat's bounce
 one hanging man & three black crows
 a busted flush this market's capped.

Buffett says be greedy when others
 are fearful be thankful when others
 get out. But I forget. This schooling
 only somehow spreads to half the bed.
 In times covert & under covers
 the rancid-mouthed day's an emptied pit;
 stats tick up then values collapse I
 weep for the Moon-boys sold VET & TRON
 spent along the road to Organon.

FURLOUGHED

times not of our choosing Adrienne Rich

Writing on eighty percent feeling
 deprived short on content missing
 the crooning even the jaded pottering here
 among hazy vibes barely speaking

shoehorned in as a bit player clumsily
 overdubbed in mismatched accents scribbling
 astrofizz for the beer & popcorn market

time hangs heavy over the mosh pit

on the street as if certain of a future a few
 fun set pieces abuse & argument light
 on plot missing the real action stripped

down to a pale facsimile no loop pedal no
 metrical jams to quicken the pulse simply
 notching a way up the clinical frailty scale

now only numbers where people were

so many whisked over the top in a culture of
 carelessness trapped in the hands
 of a cheery old card coppers on bikes
 are clearing the beach *be absolute.*

LOOKING UPWARDS / LOOKING DOWNWARDS:
SOME REACTIONS TO CONFINEMENT

II

Little Dorrit

In chapter thirteen of Dickens's monumental novel about the stain of imprisonment the reader is introduced to the 'little fiction' by which means Mrs Plornish escapes from the confined living premises of London's Bleeding Heart Yard. The Yard itself is reached by going down a flight of steps 'which formed no part of the original approach' and one could only get out of it 'by a low gateway into a maze of shabby streets, which went about and about, tortuously ascending to the level again.' This infernal region of London is made up of large houses which are divided into tenements in such a manner as to anticipate the account given by Jacob A. Riis in his 1890 publication *How the Other Half Lives* in which he describes the growth of Lower East Side Manhattan where large houses are divided up 'without regard to light or ventilation, the rate of rent being lower in proportion to space or height from the street.'

Plornish the plasterer ingeniously directs his visitors to the 'parlour' room in which his family live 'by means of a painted hand under his name, on the forefinger of which the artist had depicted a ring and a most elaborate nail of the genteelest form, referring all enquirers to that apartment' and it is the inside of this cramped living-space which affords Mrs Plornish her 'fiction' by means of which one is enabled to 'escape' from the confines of a prison by a leap of the imagination:

This poetical heightening of the parlour consisted in the wall being painted to represent the exterior of a thatched cottage; the artist having introduced (in as effective a manner as he found compatible with their highly disproportioned dimensions) the real door and window.

The modest sunflower and hollyhock were depicted as flourishing with great luxuriance on this rustic dwelling, while a quantity of dense smoke issuing from the chimney indicated good cheer within, and also, perhaps, that it had not been lately swept. A faithful dog was represented as flying at the legs of the friendly visitor, from the threshold; and a circular pigeon-house, enveloped in a cloud of pigeons, arose from behind the garden-paling.

For the inhabitants of this claustrophobic tenement which exists below the level of the main streets of London this interior decoration is 'a most wonderful deception' and 'it made no difference that Mrs Plornish's eye was some inches above the level of the gable bed-room in the thatch'.

One of the most uplifting versions of this expansion of confined conditions through the use of pictures is, of course, the 1994 film of Stephen King's book, *The Shawshank Redemption*. Over the course of nineteen years Andy Dufresne tunnels an escape route out of his cell with a small rock-hammer whilst covering the hole with the large pin-up film photos he has attached to the wall. The sense of time passing is conveyed to us by the shift in style of these iconic photographs: Rita Hayworth is replaced after ten years by Marilyn Monroe's moment in *The Seven Year Itch* where she stands over a subway grating with her dress blowing up and then by Raquel Welch's furred bikini-appearance in *One Million Years BC*. Just as pictures can encourage the mind to escape from the narrow confines of physical space, the truth behind these full-length photographs of film stars is a literal passage to freedom. As Andy says to his friend Red, the truth is simple 'Get busy living or get busy dying': the imprisonment of despair, the absence of hope, is more damning than the walls themselves. In a similar vein the David Lean film of *Great Expectations* ends with the breaking out from the confines of a dead house. In the last scenes Pip enters the grounds of Satis House by passing through a barred gateway the spikes of which emphasise the prison motif. When he sees Estella sitting surrounded by the decay of the past she suggests that she is going to live in this dark confinement for the rest of her life and it is at this point that he shouts 'I have come back to let in the sunlight'. Pulling down the torn and faded curtains he commands her to 'come with me out into the sunlight...Let's start

again, together.' In 1946 this would certainly have been an ending to lift the spirits after the horrors of the previous six years of war but it is also a far cry from the world of Charles Dickens who was more fully aware of the stain that prison leaves upon the mind and the impossibility of ever disentangling the nets of being. In Dickens's first novel Mr Pickwick views the squalor of the Fleet Prison with 'the people crowding and flitting to and fro, like the shadows in an uneasy dream' and concludes 'I will be a prisoner in my own room' and remains shut up for 'three long months' only 'stealing out at night to breathe the air when the greater part of his fellow prisoners were in bed or carousing in their rooms.'

MOYRA TOURLAMAIN

FROM HERE

With the rain,
your stranger's face
mouths against the window pane.
clowning, crying, in a silent film.

Here, on the other side,
my finger traces backwards from the ends
of washed out words
you try to write with raindrops
on the clouded glass.

