

Buffalo Rhetoric --J

I hear that fat broad yelling again. A cock in her throat warning of morning's creep, and she talks about medication and candor. *Now now, old men and women, don't shit on the floor. Now now, don't be human. You are coat racks with oxygen tongues.* These thoughts are neither mine or hers, but belong to this place where people die to make room for all the screaming bundles of unabortion. I'm wrapt in blue--I'm a boy with droop and fag for lung lining.

The linoleum is cold and I've no shoes. Bedsheets for clothes but they call them gowns, I call them bedsheets because I'm liable to bleed or piss on them any time and I sleep on steel sofas and at rigid statue. I sleep at odd times because the night makes the window look penetrable and the daytime houses all the blind. That woman's at it with Bernia.

No no, let go you old bitch.

Cullen, sit down. Eat your breakfast.

This is shit in a bowl you cunt.

Cullen, sit down.

Sit on it you cunt.

Cullen, I don't want to have to resort to discipline.

This is an asylum for those with too little a mind to be called insane. Strolling through with Nietzsche, nipping at the alcohol running from his pores. But maybe I'm a whimsy in a world of shit and fat broads. An old turtle and there's broth all about me and Bernia's said nothing but Cunt for the last five minutes.

The first time I said Cunt my mother and father had beat the shit out of me. My father with his fists, my mother with his belt and weeks of silent treatment, night-time aggression, even moderate starvation. Cunt is not a good word to use unless you want to starve and Bernia can't stop saying it.

Shut up you filthy cunt.

Stop it.

You cunt. You bint, you nag, you cunt.

I admire Bernia for this because I've not uttered Cunt in five years, and the last time was to a wall after I'd fallen, alone in my house with the lights off and the gas on. I thought Cunt would be my last word but I'm hoping that's reserved for God Take That Fat Old Bitch Instead.

I think my jaw is a little loose but it may be my lips and I start muttering Fuck under my breath until the fat broad looks at me and asks what I just said. Bernia has stopped calling the cunt a Cunt.

I didn't say anything.

Yes you did.

No I didn't.

Yes you did and I bet I know what it was and it was ugly.

Bernia sneaks a Cunt before being led off into the common room.

Look, if I say I didn't say a goddamn word I didn't say a good goddamn word. Let me be and go tend to the other retards.

You're not retarded.

Bernia would call her a cunt right now.

I must be retarded if you can't stop calling me retarded.

I didn't say that.

If I don't know what comes out of my mouth I guess I'm a retard.

You're not, you're old.

What's in your mouth?

Buffalo Rhetoric --J

What?

You old cunt. It's morning, leave me the fuck alone. Go trounce something where I can't see.

That is ugly language.

I'm not speaking to you.

You're going to be disciplined.

Touch me and I'll fall.

She stares, unwilling. I'm a limber person for my age, I can fall with the best of them. If I twist just right, I may fracture something rather than bruise.

You won't do it.

I've done it before and it nearly had the officials up your tight ass.

She wants to see me fall and she wants to keep her job and I want to shatter my leg and beat it against her for ruining my dreams every day for the last five years.

Fine. Don't forget to eat your breakfast.

I won't if I'm not a retard.

You're not a--never mind it.

I'd like to splay my fingers to V against my mouth and thrust my tongue like that woman's never had it, but she's already elsewhere, taking a piss or berating another living corpse. I hate being old and I hated being young.

In the common room where the other sheep are eating their shit. Spoons posying to mouths, dipping, posying, like a mad carnival ride driven by ancient steers too dead to fuck or breathe right. The staff with good skin call it activity or breakfast or sun-luncheon. I call it The Fucked Brothella. Everyone's tired as one, at least, and I feel like I've whored my head every time I walk in here. Gunshots would liven but some like to color.

A friend who'll probably be dead tomorrow is coloring with Crayola and scratch paper. I wobble to him. He wobbles his head to me.

Hey.

Hello.

Morning.

It is, sadly.

What are you drawing?

My family.

You're drawing hills?

That's the grass.

And rocks?

Those are the tombstones.

You're drawing your family?

Yes.

Where are you?

I'm stuck in goddamn Mars.

This is Mars?

No, that red sun is Mars.

You'll see them again.

It'll be soon.

I hope so.

I never used to wish death on my friends. But at this age, at this terminus, the only people worth dying are the little ones who destroy their bodies and leech from the government and they're too sturdy so it balances out on us. I don't like it but I'd rather die than live in the same room as them.

Buffalo Rhetoric --J

The little graveyard. It's drawn with the hand of a kindergärtner too young to sin but too old to be innocent. It looks like shit because I used to study the Arts and this is no Gogh but it's the same febrile madness. My friend here is lovingly close to it and he could slit his dry wrists with the edge of the paper. He is fragile as a child and with a history as evil as anyone else.

Why don't you number them?

What?

The graves.

You mean name them?

Yes.

He draws names that mean nothing to me on the grey blobs.

This is my son, Patrick. He died when he was fifteen. This was my wife.

And this was my daughter. She isn't dead yet.

Why did you draw her?

I hate her to death. She was always a nagging bitch.

You're not exactly in a position to say she should be dead.

I'll have to see her in the afterlife and she'll still be a bitch.

What about your son?

I miss him. I can die to see him.

Good.

And my wife. If only I can keep that other bitch out of the house.

House in the afterlife?

Yes. It'll have dirt walls.

Like a grave.

Yes, like a grave and the neighbors will have big noses.

What?

Nothing.

You're odd.

I'm a walking cobbler of shit and memory.

Really odd.

The regime.

What?

The regime.

What the fuck is that?

God doesn't have soldiers who fight for him. He has conscription.

Okay. I'm going to go.

See me?

I see you.

On the picture.

I see your name next to the red sun.

Yes. I can't touch them again, can I?

Your family?

Yes. I can't ever see them again. I want to so much.

You'll see them.

Will I?

I hope so.

Will they be different?

Your boy might. You haven't seen him in fifty years?

It's been forty.

Good. He'll be a grown man then.

He can't grow in the ground.

Then he's still a boy and he's waiting for you.

Buffalo Rhetoric --J

I bet his mother's driven him crazy. She almost did me.

I wait for a chuckle but I think he's serious.

I'm going to go now.

Okay.

I wish him a pleasant death and retreat back to The Fucked Nursery. The Fucked Brothel still entertains the coat-racks. This room is wooden paneled like the staff smoke a lot in here or gamble or sneak pussy. If I had enough money on hand, I'd buy some cigarettes and finish killing myself or lend a tip to one of the younger nurses here for some exercise. I've seen some of the other patients here do it. Everyone is a zealous whore. Feels like capitalism.

Two whitecoats are playing cards. This isn't a staff only zone but I bet I'm like a little child attending his brother's cherry burst, unwanted but I can't be smacked with a broom. At first glance, I steady my heels.

Can I come in?

They say nothing.

So I can?

Yes come in.

Walk toward them and they scoot their asses over so the booth is impenetrable.

Can I play cards?

No.

Why not?

We have four hands to use, and fifty cards. What the fuck are you going to do? Sit there and dribble?

I can play a good poker.

No. Sit down and talk to yourself.

You little bastard.

At this, they smile. I can do nothing and they won't beat me to death. I lose at this game. I sit at another booth. Empty, I'm empty.

Evening shits itself onto my day and it comes quick. I'm reading a book-- I can still read, surprisingly--about a man in Mexico who fondles the sun every night and slips a plastic bag over its head. It's a brutal little myth but it's the only entertainment I can get besides listening to Cunt on redefinition. In bed, I am, alone in my room with no company but my shallow breath. It's more alive than my brain cells so it probably thinks more about me than I do it. Maybe it hears more. The next page of the book tells about shooting the sun in its forehead. Every chapter is about another way to murder the sun. It's amazing. Next page is about rape. Play on words of Go Down.

Fooling with the sun is something we all try to do. I wake, I bitch, and I walk past a thick window thinking about how to shoot it out of the sky. It burned me every minute of my life, and now, in this subtly disguised hell, it still looks down. I want its pity but it doesn't shed even that. When I was born, the first rays had hurt my eyes. My mother had told me about it. She was a drunk with a heavy hand, as I've said, and when I was thirteen the sun had blistered my shoulderblades so that when my girl had tried to massage me, I bled through my shirt and screamed. It took me another five years to get pussy and talking about it like this makes me sad, nostalgic.

The sun is an implacable wizened bastard. Trying to make it go down on you only serves to burn your hands. Raging against it makes me whisper for Death at night and I whisper for Death as I finish the seventh chapter. The man cuts the sun's head off and I can't figure where land its shoulders.

Buffalo Rhetoric --J

I remember seeing a man who weighed forty pounds. I think he weighed quite a bit higher than that but the red sign in front of the glass had told me forty. He wore his bones for skin because he was completely, primordially white and bald and even the concaves of his near-protruding bones made light shadows. His eyes were brown and that struck me as very odd.

I hadn't much money. Enough for a couple attractions before I had to get back but I'd heard tell of this man through a friend with slightly more age and money. If you tap the glass, he hissed.

I tapped the glass and he was quiet, reading a book. I'd always wanted my money back. I must be in an attraction now because every old piece of shit in this place is an attraction unadorned with signs of advertising bravado. So ancient to be forgotten. I'd throw rocks or pills at the little tapping ones anyway.

Bernia refuses to eat. The fat broad looks sweaty today but everyone else looks cool and the air conditioner is louder than ever. If she is a cunt to me I will ask her if she just got fucked by a monster.

Eat.

No.

Eat, Cullen.

No.

Eat.

No you cunt.

Eat.

No you bleeding cunt.

That word's really silly.

Brevity of the tongue makes a sad sad cunt.

I giggle for a moment and Bernia stances into submission. Humor signifies her defeat and her tongue has tread more filth than my feet.

Sighing and the moment dies and my friend draws another piece of shit and he's still alive. I could cut him or stab his eye with a crayon but that would be a waste of a day.

Still. View a panorama of The Fucked Brothella. I've noticed a reaction of yawns amongst the corpses. When one opens his mouth and tries to purge his soul, the others follow suit, some without looking. I'm prey, too.

I was in a hospital's nursery ward once--twice, actually--and I remember a similar observance of all the little ones yawning at once. I also heard that's because God is trying to stay in them but I heard that from a zealot who beat his children. Whatever the reason, I don't like imagining us as an impotent camp of children. Yawning newborns with dementia and hatred.

Our shit doesn't smell like ginger.

Noon and we have a special guest. I've never heard of him before but he looks nice. In the common room wearing some new style nonsense. Beads around his neck.

I've come from Massachusetts to speak to you all.

For what?

To read some things.

Why?

To read some things.

We can read.

Some of us can read.

The staff hushes us. The stranger is allowed to continue and I already

Buffalo Rhetoric --J

distrust him.

He pulls a paper from a briefcase. Begins to read it in a voice that bothers.

*I once knew a man who trusted folly
so much that palsy took his wallet
and stripped his trees of honey
and stripped his bees of tones and trolleys
of their iron and transport and humans of their folly.
I once knew a woman who trusted folly
so much that she followed with skies and holleys
red bloody to the marksman's corridor
where all the goats do battle in chortle
and speak to the walls without really speaking.
I knew them so well that they birthed me
and christened me Alexy and bathed me dryly
and fed me wryly so we'd food in winter and summer
and fall and spring else we'd have died alone
together in three.*

Thinking to myself What The Fuck? in a young man's voice I want to be mine. The others stare, speech dead. Bernia claps. I don't know why.

The man seems proud. I'd be proud if I could make a room full of shit be quiet. Tiredly, I say What does that mean?

The poem?

That was a poem?

Yes.

Poems are supposed to rhyme.

Not all poems, sir.

Yes, all poems.

No sir.

Fine. What does it mean?

It means different things.

Do you know what it means?

It's called lung poetry. It matters more on how you say it than what's said. If I spoke in a monotone, it wouldn't mean anything.

What kind of poetry is that?

Lung poetry. Recitation of lung poetry.

Bernia doubles over in spasms and the floor positively pocks with her blood. She spews it like vomit and I walk to her in a second and the staff pushes me out the way. I know in an instant she's going to die shortly and the guest man who made Bernia recite lung poetry from her throat leaves in a hurry.

He is a man of fine tastes, to do that. Quietly, Bernia dies. Shudders, gasps like the other old shit and then she dies and I weep that night because I'll probably never hear Cunt again. One less lethal fucking zombie.

They inspect us like cattle. Lift our shirts, prod. A big man, red eyes. Drinking too much and he's going around the building prodding and someone called me paranoid. I'm an old piece of shit but I'm not cattle.

He found bruises--tender as that on a child and probably less deserved--on Mickey. I wonder what Mickey did. The fat broad had never expressed singular dislike for him, but he'd insulted the other staff many times. I expect he's going to be taken and the staff will be extra sensitive to caring for our shit while the officials are looking. After that, they'll be full of resent and will

Buffalo Rhetoric --J

not mean well when fiddling bedpans. I threw some shit at one of them after a woman had died of bedsores after he'd spilled some on my leg. I'd fallen, was bedridden. He'd been fired for smoking reefer.

The schoolmaster here makes it like a long tunnel. At the end is a subtle leviathan but the walk there is long, on glass. Mickey gets out of here.

I speak with a friend.

They're going to find more, I bet.

More what?

More bruises on the others.

No, they'll not find bruises.

How do you know?

I haven't heard any screams and Mickey's turned into a nun lately.

Not speaking much?

Not since last week when he cussed that little sissy.

Right. One with all his word of God nonsense?

I wouldn't call it nonsense but yes.

He was a Mormon.

Well, it was him.

I'd like to have a few women around me.

You have this entire building to fuck.

Laughing here and I say Pussy's done turned.

They may shut this place down.

There's been worse.

The numbers pile up.

There's been worse and these fucks will kiss ass to keep their jobs.

I hope so.

At least you're not one of these willing-to-die people.

Death comes best when I'm not ready for it.

I'd rather shake his hand first, make greetings.

Want to chuckle, as the prospect of death has been the object of great humble relief around here. But the bruises on Mickey don't make for good tickle.

I'm reading a book about life.

What?

About life's complications. How we complicate it.

People? Old people?

Everyone. Younger people, actually. About how we always fuck everything up by trying to conquer it.

Like death?

Yes, and science and God.

Beads make an empire. Industry makes a pit in the ground.

What?

Beads are money, clothing, sex. I wrote a thesis about it nearly sixty years ago. Beads color cheaply, provide the necessary factions of humanity, and symbolize peace. Industry wears linen.

Like one of those Indians.

Native American, and yes. Beads are the product of living harmonious. Industry and steam--your little predicament about conquering life--just ruin.

I wonder if it's possible to answer life.

It isn't a question, surely. It answers you and then you die.

I don't believe that. There's more.

No there isn't. There was more when you were twenty. You've lived through

Buffalo Rhetoric --J

all the more. And now there is no more.

Shit.

It is shit. Simplicity belongs to the youth, but it lingers with us so we can't do all that much. It isn't right and it doesn't work too well.

I'm not all that simple.

You walk the same footsteps everyday. I do.

Hell.

It is hell but it may just be a precursor. Are you familiar with Buffalo Rhetoric?

No. My friend and I sit down in a chair, in the common room and he wants badly to puff a cigarette. He's chewing his lip. His muddy eyes are looking around like he's said all this many times, perhaps to himself. I know I've spent enough time talking to the mirror.

Buffalo Rhetoric is the idea of recurrence. You've noticed similarities between the beginning and end of life?

Yes like how everyone shits on themselves.

Yes. It's the idea the time between that, birth and death, is just rhetorical. There's no point to it, other than the biological. We don't learn all that much, nothing that's really learning and not just compounding kernels of thought.

Like a baby learns to read?

A small child, but yes. As a child, we learn vast amounts of knowledge with virtually no bases. At the end of our lives, we begin to forget all the other things we learned as an adult but we keep the basic curiosity, except those of us who've chosen to frolic in death.

It's just dementia.

No, deeper than the physical brain. We're at the same level as a child but we've more pain. Someone in their twenties is out fucking, killing others. Making children of their own. But we're them in the future and we're them when they were born.

Sounds interesting. And where did you learn this?

It's just a theory I had in college.

You were twenty in college.

My grandfather knew a lot and he told me of his life. I gathered some interests.

Why Buffalo?

Buffalo were nearly killed off and we don't notice it too much any more. It killed the Native Americans but we've since forgotten.

Why are you telling me this?

Because children have parents to love them. Until they feel pain, all they know is love. Look at us. We're beaten. Most of us want to die.

So?

It's proof the world is cruel to something innocent. The facade about children being the card by which wars or bloodshed is stopped. We're children and we're left to rot.

I don't know if I care any more.

I don't know either.

Another midnight and the sun is crawling out of the earth, its burial months before. The world has been in a doomsday panic and eventual apathy but the sky explodes with dawn and peace reigns and that's the last chapter, a happy ending. I put the book down. That's the end of life, then. A happy

Buffalo Rhetoric --J

ending.

My wife was a kind woman, in hindsight. I hit her a few times, she threatened divorce a few times. But it was a good relationship for many decades until she left me. Somehow the old bag managed to trail some money from another man, older than me and better off. Our kids were well grown, with kids of their own. I still had them but her shit tore our family apart. But we were old then and we're old now and the world is happiest with us locked away.

There had been another woman. She had died in a winter. I'd shot her in the collarbone after she pulled a knife. Ensued threats, fear. She had ran outside into isolation and her footsteps built hollows into the snow and red led me to her. I never completely regretted it because she would have killed me --that kind of woman always will--and she would have fucked up my family. Considering how well I did that just a few years later, it may not have been a good idea. The sun rose a million year before I first stuck it in a girl and it will rise for millions after I'm ashes or roots.

This saddens me at this late hour and makes me relieved. My death isn't another selfish epitome, then. I can go and not leave any special deficit. My kids will be the same in another three decades, their kids accordingly. Depressing to think about this.

Another friend was put on an oxygen tank. She'd been walking around with the luggage, trying to figure her new imbalance. She told me if we can't breathe with our own lungs, we very well shouldn't breathe but to refuse treatment is suicide and against God but I had heard the woman cussing all kinds of divinities. She's a saintly old girl. Another notch.

Yawning oxygen into and out of metal. Us coat-racks, forgotten and wasting. I still feel like skin but admittedly, it isn't so smooth any more. I am leather stretched over drying blood.

I read enlightenment only comes to people who've thought enough about life and atrocity and pleasure, and who have found some medium. I really don't think I have much longer to live. Death is me going back into a womb of dirt, of equal warmth because I can't really feel much if all my nerve endings are dead. Only fear is getting drunk from the embalming fluids.

I miss my family and the way it was. I sound like I'm drawing a cemetery with the shittiest of coloring. I regret living the way I did.

Nothing to be done about it. My kids will wake up one night and talk to themselves about death and how good it is and they will look around at the shit that call themselves seniors and they will see avatars of the soul without any art. I exit my room and go to Wanda with the liquor.

I need a nip.

Rough night alone?

God yes.

Just for you.

It isn't anything like Jack but it isn't water. The burn is nice.

Are you okay?

Yes, I'm going to die today.

You're that lucky?

We're all that lucky.

If you say so.

Wanda, do you know what I heard?

What.

If we're healthy when we die of natural causes, it's like suicide.

That's shit.

Buffalo Rhetoric --J

My heart is healthy but it's going to stop.

You must have fucked up your meds.

It'll stop but it doesn't have to stop, and the equity of my life will turn to shit and I'll be auctioned for the next little bundle of mother's joy.

You're fucked up.

Like I said, we're all so lucky. All lucky to meet the morningstar or just a black swallowing antidawn.

Go back to bed. You're talking about shit.

Morning. The sun is cold to the touch. Like a morgue of the colossus. Brittle wind outside and the grass is almost frosty with dew. I'm standing still, shoulders hunched. I look a youth.

My intellectual friend is with me.

You think today's your day?

Yes. It has to be.

Does it feel like your wedding?

Feels better.

Death isn't a comforting thing, whatever your philosophy on it. You're going to be alone.

I'm alone and living.

As you said. We all are.

He quiets. I'm living an epilogue right now. I've died since I tasted air and recycled all my body's meats through a warmer. If I saw every moment of my life--on my face, as if I were opposite the mirror and only I was present in its depth--I'd see a blur of apathetic disbelief at all the tragedy and irony and comedy and love and spite. I'd be handsome again, then older and mature and wealthy, then here again and I'd be watching the mirror in askance question, Who's the Fairest of my life and I'd answer You If.

God, I'm dead and the wind is still brittle.

The story of the phoenix is well known, even to a piece of shit like me. Born then burned then born. Stillbirths don't happen here because the catalyst of that soul is perfect. An afterlife would have to be the ashes of the autistphoenix chapters, all burnt beyond repair or interpretation. I wonder if it's selfish to deny a place in this world. There are enough children in it as is.

Are you okay?

I don't answer him this morning. I've felt a nag at my chest the last five minutes, breathing a little harder to force it out. This blood tumor's going to catch fire and I'll breathe it out when I die. The next thing to crawl out the penis or the cunt will breathe, harshly, loudly, and I won't be able to sift through the sun's corpse, this beast I spent my life wrangling only to wake up brain-dead and six feet smaller. The first and omega memory of death and dewy grass and olding yawns and dirt for expense.

//

wc. 4700