

Dylan Aiello on Elif Saydam, *La belle dame sans merci*

Aerial view of a residential Toronto neighbourhood. Rain reaches rooftops already joined in a pillow of moisture.

We see pith between wall covering and cavity; stainless steel strapping crumpled into raw edges; frayed cabling and rust rebar; spray foam pushing out of cracks between boards; pink fibreglass wetted to a dripping mulch; post joints darkened by mildew and slipping apart; water, mostly solidified with silt, pooling in bowed gyprock; laminated plywood timbers and a burgundy sectional couch burned, then wetted, then burned again; galleries in crumbling beams exposed like the gaping pores in noses of drunks; gnawed frass glueing in clumps; mud mixed with shit mixed with blood; wet, picked, goose down insulating a nest of waxy young twigs; green ants crowding the eye sockets of two perished hatchlings within.

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“You ever think about, if a bug feels pain? Or if she gets to be afraid? If she gets to think, *death, right now, is an option* when you’re trying to squish her?”

“I mean, that’s the thing about how WE kill them. I’m certain that I know for sure how it feels for them. First, getting a little delirious, after a few hours, the muscardine start to work on the brain tissue, the choline start to build up on the synapse, she’ll dig in and feast, joyful, on’r own bowels, peel back an exoskeleton and bury chewing parts in her abdomen, roll around, orgiastic delirium, bodies rubbing against bodies for communal comfort. Thinking, *this is right, this feels right*. Shit her guts out, loses control of’r breathing, rapid then slow, no shame at all. Her vision, more fractured, more partial. Finally, she forgets size, her instincts, her raging will to survive softens to a silly, playful dance. Then, she gets to crawl out, feel the light, feel the heat, feel her nerves fry up in a final eruption of firing, devouring her instincts, singeing off her experience with a spectacular hissing blaze.”

“Biodeterminist, pheromonofatalist! You think our little arthur-pods are just out there, wagging dick parts at pussy parts, no pleasure, fear or fantasy, burying chewing and sucking parts in flesh and sugar, and shitting enough along the way to keep them fresh, hungry and horny? Just so. Only to keep the clan renewing, bonds weather, keep the animal kingdom checked and checking, keep the soil turning over, the shirtless fed and the others squirming and shoddy in their beds of woe?”

“Like as if they’re nodes? On a mechanical network? Pumping in, up and down, side to side and diagonaal? Just responding to stimuli, chemical impulses and uncontrollable attraction?”

“Or maybe you just need reminding. What even your Anne must have told, while rocking you away to sleep, as the vine tickled this little piggy, the roach nibbled on the roast beef and that little piggy had none, while the black mould spread across your lips as you suckled your bed-time snack right from that unctuous teat she offered you up like the blood open from her very veins.”

“...when I was all done on that nipple, she’d tuck me in, make her eyes good and wide and peer down into mine so as I know, now, it’s time for truths and no folly, and she would sing softly right down to the back of the black pupils, to the bone down beneath the brain: *Now sweet-pea, you know it’s not always been so*, even as she brushed away tick and flea and mite and fly *and it’s not always gonna be either*, her hands on spider, mosquito, beetle, earwig, worm and moth and millipede, as she stroked a bed of moss where she lay my milky head *until she lets us rule her again.*”

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Love is trouble. Tangles wrack, when it happens and fixes. Bonds weather. Repeats then stops.

Jay feels around for clusters of preconditions and provisos and tries to knead them out. Defining features of his process: misdirection, complicity, congratulations, shame, shelter. Jay, running hands across his features, down his chest, hands filthy, the eventuality of death all over him, entertains rejection.

Doing the slow work of stripping out single strands woven into these bundles bunched at lesions on the perimeter of consciousness, he taps in the fog from subject to subject. To feel from one to the next depends on (his) rigour and (its) severity . This time around. And the groping, of contours only, is done three times removed, reversed along axes, like trying to fix a clock with chopsticks. (After several tries) he introduces the notion that those nodes are fallible, or (even) at fault. Water and soap mingle from nail to wrist. Calcium has chewed through the base of the faucet. Out of a hairline fracture dribbles dark water, heavy with rust and sediment. He’s moving quickly with no special attention.

“I heard something...” there was, in fact, contact. Lancing boil spews foetid. “But I can’t be sure.”

Love observed, one-sided in a ripple, may appear to collect, become tumorous, feedback, crowd within and consume the host.

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Ok, so I'm not sure if I understood this completely. I was really drowsy and kept falling asleep while I was watching an episode of Carl Sagan's *Cosmos*. I think the origin of life went this way: the world's magnet caused cis and trans molecules to fan out in rough circles. Billions of these fans happened. Meanwhile, all kinds of different random elemental stuff swam in and around this geometry. Little by little the fans formed the most subtlest of skins around their outside, but that didn't stop the elemental stuff from swimming freely.

Stay with me.

At some point that skin got a little bit thicker. The subtlest of skins became a slightly knobbly rippled membrane. Billions of fans now became billions of containers. Now all the different random stuff couldn't swim in and out quite as easily. All of these now separated, now interior places were different lotteries for the genesis of life. In one of them, at least, the right random stuff started to tangle in complex ways. That tangle taught itself to duplicate, procreate, complicate.

Before that, everything on Earth was just... outside. There was no such thing as inside. With the skinniest of skins, Earth finally had some place out of the rain, some place set off from the stark open wide.

It feels so good to be soft and calm in my little inside.

*"I put you in my room and now you are treasure,
And of there, out, now you are in, and home"*

– Dylan Aiello