LIONEL SHRIVER ON LEFTY LINGO

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DOWN AND OUT IN SILICON VALLEY



LAUREN ELKIN ON THE PUNK BALZAC A LIFE OF FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT FICTION BY DAVID MEANS secretary girl O Elise Cowan—I rejected them—they are my ministering angels—and they believe in me to save them?!!!—Horror! They maybe are sent to save me and I not knowing in my ride act Prophet over them and withdraw from their embrace and copulation and vomit of new birth—What will happen to Peter if I leave him, if I change my life, if I die—and I will change my life and die—that means he will have to also—I have not let him prepare! I have promised too much and can I deliver?

All souls answered in the seance, with many sighs and thoughts of final deathheads and vomiting in the Jungle night. Experienced a terror that it was all Real, more real than I ever can know, and the great conspiracy has only begun to enter my consciousness—that all know except me—I am alone to die.

Ramon came and told me to vomit where I was if need be—I did again later, serpents in mind and the Little Death the Sign in the vibrations of the nominal world I felt as real for the first time Now I want to sleep—it's all too real—Naomi's death, and Louis to come, Eugene who knows best and marries—Grandma on the verge—careless—

"The Great Pan is Dead," God the Father Dies too, for we are the God—and Ezra Pound, why does he hate the Jews? Hate me? Am I that lost, that much the Serpent?

Shit, when I came home, dropping out of my body another reminder of the ghostly state of decomposition and change—

he Height—in the Music of Infinity—my skull rocking back and forth as if settling in the pillow to a final still position, as will be my last movement of head before death—a NO sign, in Xray, or realization—No I was all wrong, No I am not ready to die—No, I resign myself to thee, Mystery.

[Critique] ROY MEETS WORLD

By Lynne Tillman, from an untitled essay in Book of Roy, a collection of photographs by Neil Drabble that was published in October by MACK. Tillman's essay accompanies Drabble's photographs of an American teenager named Roy taken between 1998 and 2005.

It is hard to fathom a time before child-hood, but at one time it didn't exist—not in the way it does now. The origins of the rights

of children go back centuries. The right for the young even to have rights evolved slowly—over five hundred years—and is still evolving. Children have been, and in some places still are, their parents' workhorses. In other places, children have recently sued to "divorce" their parents.

[Reflection] SONG OF MY SHELF

From sentences in movie reviews by James Patterson.

I'm a little nuts and a little sick

It should be obvious that I like preposterous stories Stephen King commented that he doesn't have any respect for me

Hey, there's no accounting for taste!

Some writers have diarrhea of the pen, like me

Poor Herman Melville might be rolling in his grave For years some knuckleheads have criticized my books without actually reading them

Screw the critics

I suspect a lot of critics were lonely, misunderstood teens

I've got my own teenage problems

I don't particularly like video games

I have never really been with The Force

How could a movie called Sex Tape, with Cameron Diaz, be unwatchable?

Too much bang-bang, not enough hah-hah

And I'm no red-meat yahoo

I'm a sucker for romance

I'm such a girl

I like books about women; I like movies about women

I'm really happy that women are finally going out to see movies that their husbands and boyfriends might not be interested in

I understand the economics of young women acting as stupidly as young males

We're all caught between the greedy mob at the top and the greedy mob at the bottom

What to do, what to do?

Should I become an actor on the series How I Met Your Mother? I don't think so

I leave it to you to make your own decisions

I have been to this sad place before

I spent a couple hours in Tom Cruise's house last year

I'd take it up with my shrink if I had a shrink My problem, not yours





The Sleepwalkers and Rope-a-Dope, mixed-media artworks by Deborah Roberts, whose work was on view in July at Stephen Friedman Gallery, in London.

One can see child laborers in, say, Lewis Hine's photographs and, further back, in pictures from the Victorian era. Small faces are darkened with sludge or grease; small hands do repetitive work. Today, in some parts of the world, little hands are touching wires for a computer's motherboard.

The absence of childhood is evident in court paintings—children standing next to their elders, dressed like them, tiny adults. Throughout recorded history, an eight-year-old could become an emperor or king or pharaoh. Children sat on thrones, small as they were, in ceremonial costume and imbued with institutional majesty, their wills and whims guided, goaded, or denied by loyal or disloyal advisers.

UNESCO proclaimed 1979 to be the International Year of the Child, and in 1989 the United Nations established the Convention on the Rights of the Child. What constituted a child presented the body with a profoundly

daunting question. "Child" is, after all, a very temporary condition. In the West, generally, a child was a person too young, say, to work in a factory. But the age at which it was permissible—twelve, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen—varied.

Scholars seem to agree that childhood in the West was invented during the nineteenth century, with the advent of the Industrial Revolution, when children worked long hours in factories. Before then, more families lived on farms, out of sight of surveillance, and children could be their parents' little workers—indentured servants until adulthood. Many children were not sent to school, unless parents sent their boys for a meager education—

reading and writing. Girls weren't taught even that.

eanwhile, nineteenth-century photographers such as Lewis Carroll (Charles Dodgson) and Julia Margaret Cameron de-

picted idyllic images of children—beatific, cherished, innocent images. They proposed through their work that childhood was sacred, when it never had been before.

From the 1950s on, in the United States, children and teenagers were transformed, ideologically if not actually, from nothing special to special creatures. Youth was revered, celebrated, and missed by adults, some of whom described childhood as a magical time—nothing was demanded of them, only attending school—otherwise, they were free, and oh summer!

This freedom—perhaps only a sensation—ignored the differences between families and households, not only economically, but also culturally and socially. (Whatever differences in conditions exist, the characters of the agents in charge of children are not limited by them. Cruelty doesn't know class.)

What children are capable of, and how they should be punished, is debated fiercely in the United States. If a teenager murders someone, he or she might be treated as an adult, depending on the state where the murder occurred and the degree of punitiveness in that state's laws. Children are not supposed to be executed, but when is a child an adult committing a crime? The age at which execution is allowed—fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, or seventeen—varies, state by state, case by case.

The democratic technology of photography encouraged multitudes to shoot photographs, or have them taken by professionals, of their lives as they were lived. People shot their customs, rituals, themselves as youths, in old age, at picnics, on beaches, as tourists, in ceremonies such as graduations and weddings, and on and on. They kept them in albums, usually, or threw them in boxes.

In the twenty-first century, the plethora of digital photographs makes preserving them a matter of obsolescence.

A photograph once signified a visual truth—this happened, this existed. New technologies have profoundly challenged that claim. The "truth" of a photograph can be perplexing and is always dubious as a "fact." Interpretations are always inflected by a viewer's projections.

Many artists and photographers, though, work with and from facts on the ground—let's call them "actual, lived lives." These artists attempt to be true to their subject matter,

though "truth" is a dubious claim for any art form ...

W illiam Eggleston photographed the innards of a freezer—an ordinary freezer

compartment—but the picture's formal qualities register the image as unique. Eggleston is aiming to produce art from an entity without qualities. In his photograph, a viewer sees patterns, colors in the frozen-food boxes, in an overabundance of ice: it is an over-frozen formal composition. In Neil Drabble's Book of Roy, the subject/object is Roy's artlessness.

Unlike in formal portraiture, a form that Drabble has produced for years, here he is shooting unstudied-ness, informality; he is shooting pictures of a boy who is not only not posing for the camera but who is also not meant to be aware of it. Roy lets Drabble watch him, follow him, while he is being himself. But a camera is present. Roy may be aware of himself, but if he is posing, the pose is meant to be unposed. Roy is attempting to be who he is, to be himself, unselfconsciously. This is not a simple task. Awkwardness makes for awkward pictures, showing off-guardedness. Or: picturing awkwardness is awkward.

Watching Andy Warhol's Screen Tests, a viewer sees how difficult it can be for a person to hold still for three minutes. The subject is trying to pose, to maintain one expression, but soon can't and drops the pose, unable to keep it up—the performance of self. Being oneself, in this sense, is always a façade, and in performing himself, Roy, it seems, is not yet himself.

Roy mugs for the camera or ignores it entirely. But through all of his acting up—hiding under a blanket, or playing—he appears unformed, nubile, in-between, indefinite. That's not an easy case to make: How does one know what is unformed? Is it even a category of being

An amorphousness comes through Drabble's focus on Roy's face and body: soft-seeming chest, chunky belly, round, rosy, fleshy face, which, over those eight years, mutates: Roy's muscles form; his stomach hardens, there's a more pronounced rib cage, his face has lost its baby fat, his chin is sharp, angular. His shape is

defined, or formed. By the end of the book, there's the adult Roy.

Il mammals require their mother's or their herd's protection, for a long time. They are children for longer than other creatures. A baby elephant needs three years, but has to be able to stand quickly after birth. A baby human is helpless for a very, very long time, and childhood keeps getting extended in the West. Kittens are blind at birth for two weeks. But a caterpillar emerges from its cocoon a butterfly, wholly formed and flying.

Looking at someone age in increments is somehow like watching a flower bloom. Or the sun set. Forgive these prosaic analogies, but seeing photographs of Roy's emergence from adolescence into adulthood brings them to mind. And this: soon Roy will be on his own, and he will have to take care of himself.

That he will have to take care of himself builds poignancy into these images: Roy's hair being cut by his mother; Roy on a boat, sitting by his father; Roy shooting hoops. Roy doesn't appear to have a care in the world, and though this can't be true, part of what makes the pictures poignant is an apparent absence of worry, or adult concerns.

With adulthood, some ordinary stuff will come to an end; for each child, there comes an end to being parented. An adult child and a much older parent together in a photograph signifies another stage of life, an end rather

than a beginning.

Neil Drabble's sequence of portraits follows a natural progression. It moves along, and at the end of the process, Roy looks like a man. He will keep developing, of course—a person is not a static thing; there won't be a constancy in his performance of self. Roy will be himself, and not himself, and he will have other selves, in different moments and with different people. But Roy won't ever be a child again.

[Poem] SINGLE BLOOD

By Mario Santiago Papasquiaro, for Rebeca López, from Bleeding from All 5 Senses, published this month by White Pine Press. Translated from the Spanish by Cole Heinowitz.

You were born from the sperm of Gérard de Nerval
Right at the base of his scaffold
From his radiant / shattered eyes
From the entrails of his immaculate prophesy
From his strong extraterrestrial mind
From his scarred / singular fate
You blossomed / in search of me
Confronting impossible oceans
Freeing the will from violent squalls
/ By any means /
Just to be able to kiss all my sores
At the winged feet of that same scaffold
From which I too was born

[Fiction]

PROTOCOL OR: A CONTRIBUTION ON THE RENAISSANCE AS COMPILED JOINTLY WITH MY UNCLE JOSEF

By Bohumil Hrabal, from Why I Write?, a collection of prose published this month by Karolinum Press. Hrabal (1914–1997) was a Czech writer known for his novels Closely Watched Trains and I Served the King of England. Translated from the Czech by David Short.

Lf one of Christ's pals had been Římský, the celebrated baker Římský, who kicked a whore's false leg an' snapped it in two an' gave some cops such a thrashing that they needed medical attention, then things would be better. Long before Christ, the same idea was shared by the European Renaissance, Sophocles, Themistocles, Socrates, Mozart, and Goethe, the quest for a refinement of emotion and libertinism. But Christ studied among old Jews, did his translations of the Old Testament, a huge guy 'e were, 'andsome, one as knew 'ow to handle women until the rest was all envious of him, like Martha, thou art careful an' troubled about many things, he'd talk to any man an' any woman an' Martha were a gossip an' he didn't like that, because he were a doctor an' professor, a great mind an' a great scholar, an epileptic, otherwise they wouldn't have recognized him as a king and a god. Let someone try that, acting the martyr for the sake of love, an' not be a tinkling cymbal? The trouble it takes to teach an idiot geography, geometry, sometimes the teacher don't get it either. And suddenly it's like He, out of the blue, has come an' seen that this world 'asn't got itself educated to this day! It's like when you're a student or apprentice. Does everybody 'ave it written in the stars that they're purveyors to the court? An' on top o' that being a purveyor of love, 'aving everyone 'ang on till his death, through great obstacles an' hard times an' hunger an' sickness, 'aving 'em work each according to his powers an' abilities, an' also instilling all that in every idiot near an' dear to him, no pope or archbishop ever managed even half an idea of what it is to go barefoot about the world an' sleep in a stable, with just a bit o' bread an' water, it's terrible, that, an' for a chap not to sin even in his thoughts among all that vermin, there's few as are up to it, apart from Christ himself, an'