

Sarah Rosengarten

“Reality Turn On”

10 December - 15 January 2022

“Why did I not perish at birth,
 and die as I came from the womb?
¹² Why were there knees to receive me
 and breasts that I might be nursed?
¹³ For now I would be lying down in peace;
 I would be asleep and at rest
¹⁴ with kings and rulers of the earth,
 who built for themselves places now lying in ruins,
¹⁵ with princes who had gold,
 who filled their houses with silver.
¹⁶ Or why was I not hidden away in the ground like a stillborn child,
 like an infant who never saw the light of day?
¹⁷ There the wicked cease from turmoil,
 and there the weary are at rest.
¹⁸ Captives also enjoy their ease;
 they no longer hear the slave driver’s shout.
¹⁹ The small and the great are there,
 and the slaves are freed from their owners.

The realization happened by chance as I returned to my table from the bathroom at a restaurant where years before I had done something both expansive and copy-cattish, to satisfy an itch I guess or to see of what I was capable, or just to find out how much experiences themselves matter or if it’s more about their framing or the ability or desire to recount them having had them, though seeing as I can’t really speak of this experience except in the vaguest terms for fear of embarrassing or hurting others I will probably never know. It’s commonly said that writers and apparently comedians as well feel at a distance from worldly life. When reflecting on this memory, the experience to which it relates, while having the degree of inherent intensity afforded behavior that is flagrant, revealing (in a way), and violatory of certain societal standards, appears primarily to consist of a certain physical discomfort accompanied by physical absence of pleasure (one notes a certain alienation), which is to say it lacked the intensity one might expect to find both in the experience and, afterwards, to such a memory in others. So perhaps the realization was in some ways linked to having just exited the small room in which formed a distinct memory of the beginning of the end of a certain effort toward something (or other) I had exerted. As well, the restaurant and bar, quite old for the Americas, was in its early days a house of prostitution and additionally several people have been killed in and around it, including one of its previous owners.

I realized for the first time: of late I have not been suffering. In the realization I saw that my life was once filled with experiences of, in some order, fear, guilt, confusion, persecution, jealousy, confusion, pain, sadness, confusion, pain, jealousy and persecution and pain again, the persecutory and painful periods in particular calling up questions in my mind of good and evil. Though I suppose fear as a child is often fear of the evil of others, and the evil of oneself manifests, in some, as jealousy, and the fear of this evil can manifest, in some, as guilt; such were the concerns gripping at me then until I could not eat... The aforementioned alienation that has often visited me in times of pleasure was generally unfelt in painful moments, which were my constant companion and yet are now, it seems, not so any longer. My days are quite undogged by enemies, whose real or perceived slights go unfelt or come not at all, and years have passed since I sobbed with my head pressed against the cold earth. And worse, I can tell I feel I’ve earned this relative peace.

- Elise Duryee-Browner