

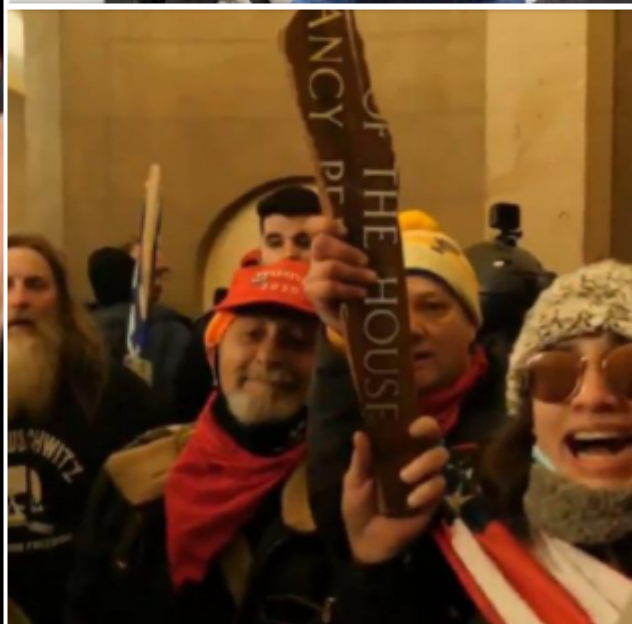
I Had No Reason To Be Over Optimistic



Well, now, then. A couple days back I tossed up my first post in months, brimming with ideas for the i2b joint in the coming year.

I'm still on for the commitments to the blog and to you, my fearless readers. But let's go ahead and say that title, the opening line from The Who's song *1921*, and my uncharacteristic stab at the putative power of positive thinking, may have been less than apropos. We likely would have been better served by a different line from that ditty. Like the one I copped for today's missive.

Yesterday's attempted rebellion against the United States government accomplished something that the legendary traitor Robert E. Lee failed to do 160 years ago: The flag of the Confederacy flew in the United States Capitol. This is no small thing. The spirit of the Confederacy suffuses the MAGA movement, leavened with a soupcon of undiluted Nazism. (Granted, Hitler's world view was directly inspired by the dictates of Old South White Supremacy, so maybe it's just a case of over-egging the pudding.)



6MWE = Six Million Wasn't Enough

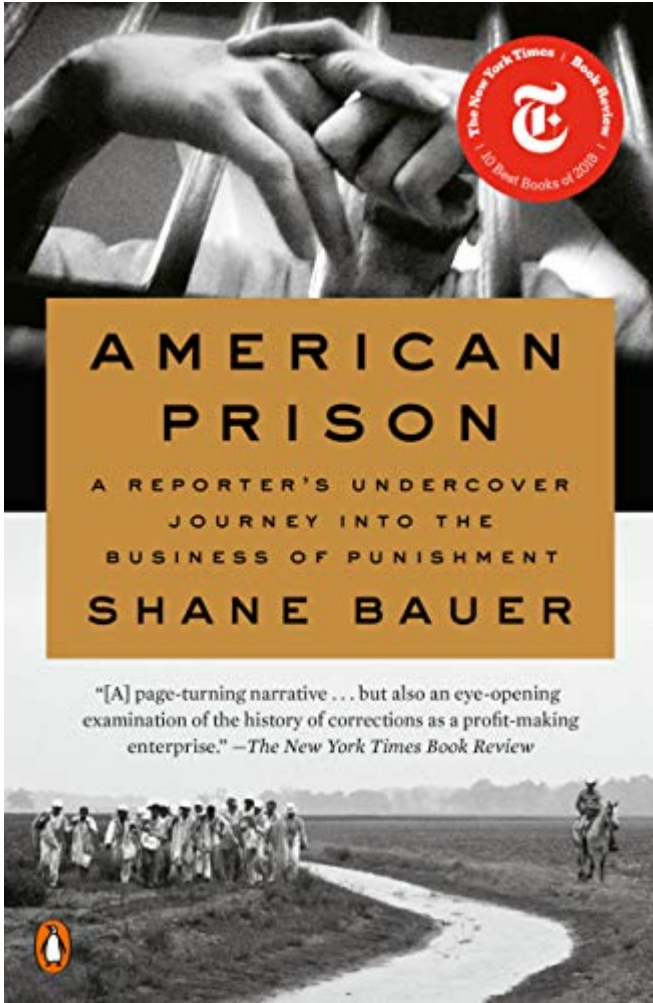
Seven months ago I forecast something along these lines. As expected, the attack on the seat of American government was abetted via complicity within the military and law enforcement community. I'm not sure I agree that the viral video that "proves" the cops threw the gates open is necessarily what the legions of re-tweeters suggest, but there is no question the overall resistance to incursion was awfully damned casual.

Either way, the photos of cops taking selfies with the rioters, the pitifully low number of arrests, and the video of the cops leading protesters gently out by the hand demonstrates a hard and disturbing truth: We need to be extremely wary of the idea that LEO and military personnel are

defenders of a broad swath of the American public. The demonstrations of excessive force at the BLM and related protests over the past year provide a stark contrast with the gentle treatment the 99.99% white mob enjoyed yesterday. If it had been a bunch of Dirty Hippies and Those People™ storming the Capitol steps, the place would have been hip deep in blood.

I've never been comfortable with the All Cops Are Bastards formulation (hashtag #ACAB). It is a tad too easy, too facile. The poverty of nuance is on par with some of the worst shorthand about liberals, feminists, and so on. But I'm damned if every day does not deliver some piece of news that gives the meme more heft and veracity.

None of this should come as any surprise. Policing in the U.S. has long been a fundamental extension of White Supremacy, a tool for keeping Black folk in their place and exploitable as a bloc of cheap labor. (Two excellent treatments of the origins of policing and imprisonment in the U.S. are Shane Bauer's *American Prison* and Keri Leigh Merritt's *Masterless Men*.)



AMERICAN PRISON

A REPORTER'S UNDERCOVER
JOURNEY INTO THE
BUSINESS OF PUNISHMENT

SHANE BAUER

"[A] page-turning narrative . . . but also an eye-opening examination of the history of corrections as a profit-making enterprise." —*The New York Times Book Review*

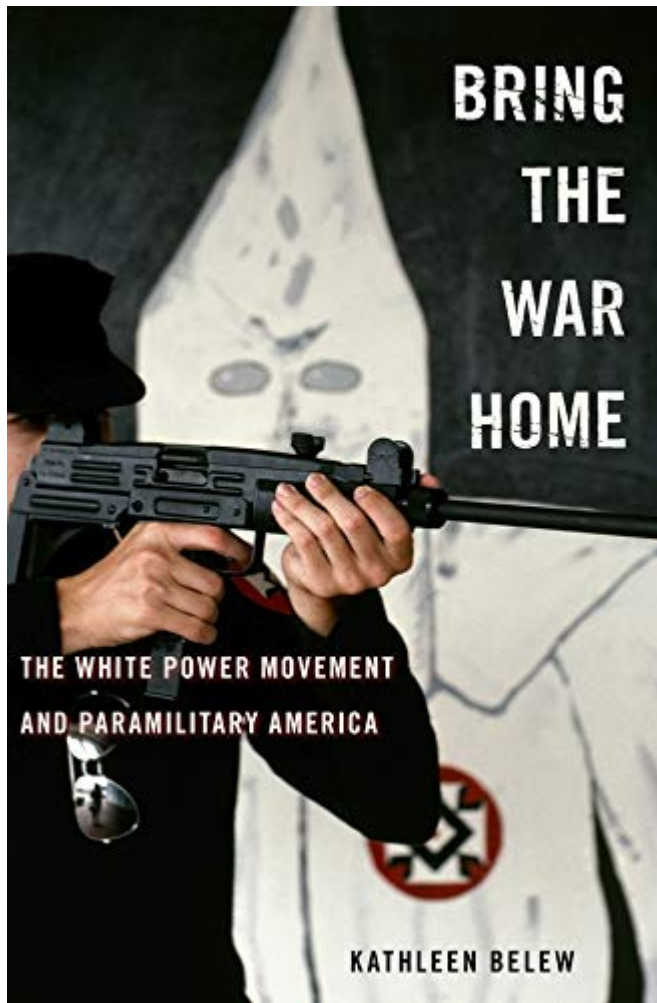


Masterless Men

Poor Whites and Slavery
in the Antebellum South

Keri Leigh Merritt





Further, a revanchist/falangist presence has been long evident in U.S. military organization. Kathleen Belew's deeply researched *Bringing the War Home: The White Power Movement and Paramilitary America* describes in particular detail the modern roots of extremist fascism embedded in the armed services, from the foot soldiers to the upper brass. Guys like Timothy McVeigh and Mike Flynn.



We keep hearing lots of “This is not who we are” nonsense about this insurrection. Tis a fine hope, indeed, but this is exactly who and what America is, and the people who think that’s just fine will go to extraordinary lengths to keep it that way. It beggars the imagination for most people not inside the fever swamp itself just how deep their belief in their entitlement runs, and the degree to which any deviation from that imagined social order fuels a misguided and destructive sense of victimhood.

It is time to work the imagination just a little harder.

In less than two weeks, Joe Biden and Kamala Harris will take their oaths of office. At that point, the legitimately elected government of the United States will be controlled by a slim majority of the Democratic Party (though in the Senate, the votes needed for the Dems to take a bare one seat advantage was 40 million more than those cast for Republicans). Sadly, along with their “this is not who we are” wishful thinking, there is a tendency for Democrats to urge a look-forward-not-back attitude toward Republican malfeasance.

Beginning with the Nixon pardon, through the Reagan/Bush Raj, and on through the depredations of Bush/Cheney, Democrats have been reluctant to push for accountability, never mind actual justice. Many of the malefactors of the Trump crime syndicate cut their teeth in the scandals of the Reagan-Bush-Bush administrations. The failure to prosecute their misdeeds are fundamental to understanding the Trumpian impulse to bluff their way through the most obvious corruptions. There has never been a price to pay. In the absence of any shame, our vaunted institutional norms are not worth the paper they were never printed on. When dealing with people whose definition of right action is nothing more than “whatever the fuck we wanna do”, better that we not rely on these folks to do the right thing of their own accord.

There can be little debate that the members of the mob are fundamentally deranged and delusional about the basic facts of the world at hand. Nothing about their sense of grievance justifies their actions. No evidence in the real world supports their beliefs – stolen election, Soros illuminati, secret pedo cabals, antifa conspiracies – any more than the birth certificate thumpers had a legitimate claim on the nativity of Obama. What they all have in common is deep gullibility and a sense of a victimhood that leaves them at the mercy of hucksters like Trump, Limbaugh, Hannity, and so on. But even though the rabble here is largely composed of

semi-sentient fantasts – and there is a good case to be made that they are pitiable victims of an especially greedy long con – there is no reason to let them evade the consequences of their stupidity. Less than a day after the dirty deed, we are hearing calls to allow enflamed passions to subside, turn the other cheek, let bygones go unprosecuted. These people have grievances, we hear, and we should respect their need to have time to heal &c.

Fuck that noise.

Despite the almost comical bravado on display, despite their blatant publicization of their felonious deeds...



“May it please the jury to consider this photograph, helpfully provided by the defendant himself...”

...be prepared for the howls about government overreach when even the slightest law enforcement tends their way. Already, several people have been sacked from their jobs for their participation, and rightly so. Yet there are cries of First Amendment violations from wannabe constitooshunal scholarz with all the sophistication of the grade school bully who steals your lunch money and snarls “It’s a free country, man” when you protest. A movement is underway to make a martyr of

the dim bulb who went and got herself shot breaking through a Capitol window, her only claim to merit arising from demonstrating that reflexively yammering “thank you for your service” to every rando who ever wore a uniform is the height of unthinking patriot posturing.

These Karens and Kevins are unaccustomed to having their actions scrutinized, and will certainly demand to speak to the manager about this outrage. I mean, it’s not like they did something awful, like smashing a window at a Target store, or god forbid, something even worse.

Like these hooligans.



Savages. How dare they?

Got a Feeling '21 Is Gonna Be a Good Year



Especially if you and me and these birds see it in together.

Your Narrator has been largely AWOL the past year. Mea maxima. The First Plague Year took its toll on ambition and productivity. 2021 is gonna be different.

I'm setting a few semi-ambitious goals for the year. Something doable, but challenging at the same time. And that means big ripples to this here little blog and the handful of you who still bother to read when I post. (My fault entirely. In June, my post about Anderson Cooper and Cornel West garnered around 1500 hits. By the time I got around to posting again a few months later, interest had waned and I did not even hit 100 on either post. Discouraging? Yeah, a bit, but nobody to blame but myself. KFG, yo.) Maybe I can reward you stalwart pals and draw some of my less devoted crowd back again.

So what am I up to? Here's the plan:

- Morning Writing; Mon to Sat, first act of the day. Once the dogs are fed and coffee brewed, I will sit down and write three to four pages of long-hand in a spiral notebook. I've been doing this since September, and it has helped get the juice flowing again. (Sunday morning is for the NYT crossword.)
- Billy Bard Intensive; M-W-F. Beginning w Sonnet #1, read and listen along with Sir Patrick, one sonnet per session. I should complete the series of 154 sonnets by

New Years Eve.

Dig the Gillian Welch t-shirt!

- Fiction Writing: This is the bigly ambitious piece. I will deliver (to myself) one short story draft every other Friday beginning January 15. That comes to 26 short stories in some semblance of wholeness for 2021. Perhaps this will add up to something.
- The i2b Blog: I promise, my pretties, that I will submit a substantial post every other Friday beginning this week, January 8. This is the bare minimum for i2b in 2021. There will most likely be additional posts along the way – musings about books, music, film/tv, politics, &c. – but the big work will be the alternating Fridays. I have a few larger thematic pieces I’ve been mulling for a while that have felt too daunting to undertake in Our Year of COVID. Time to quit fucking around, as Aristotle used to say; that was his twist on Plato’s “keep fucking going”. (You can look it up.)

It’s not that 2020 was a complete loss, though much went missing. Look, we dumped the Trump Chump. We flipped the Senate (crowing a bit ahead of the final call on Ossoff, I know, but I am uncharacteristically optimistic this morning).

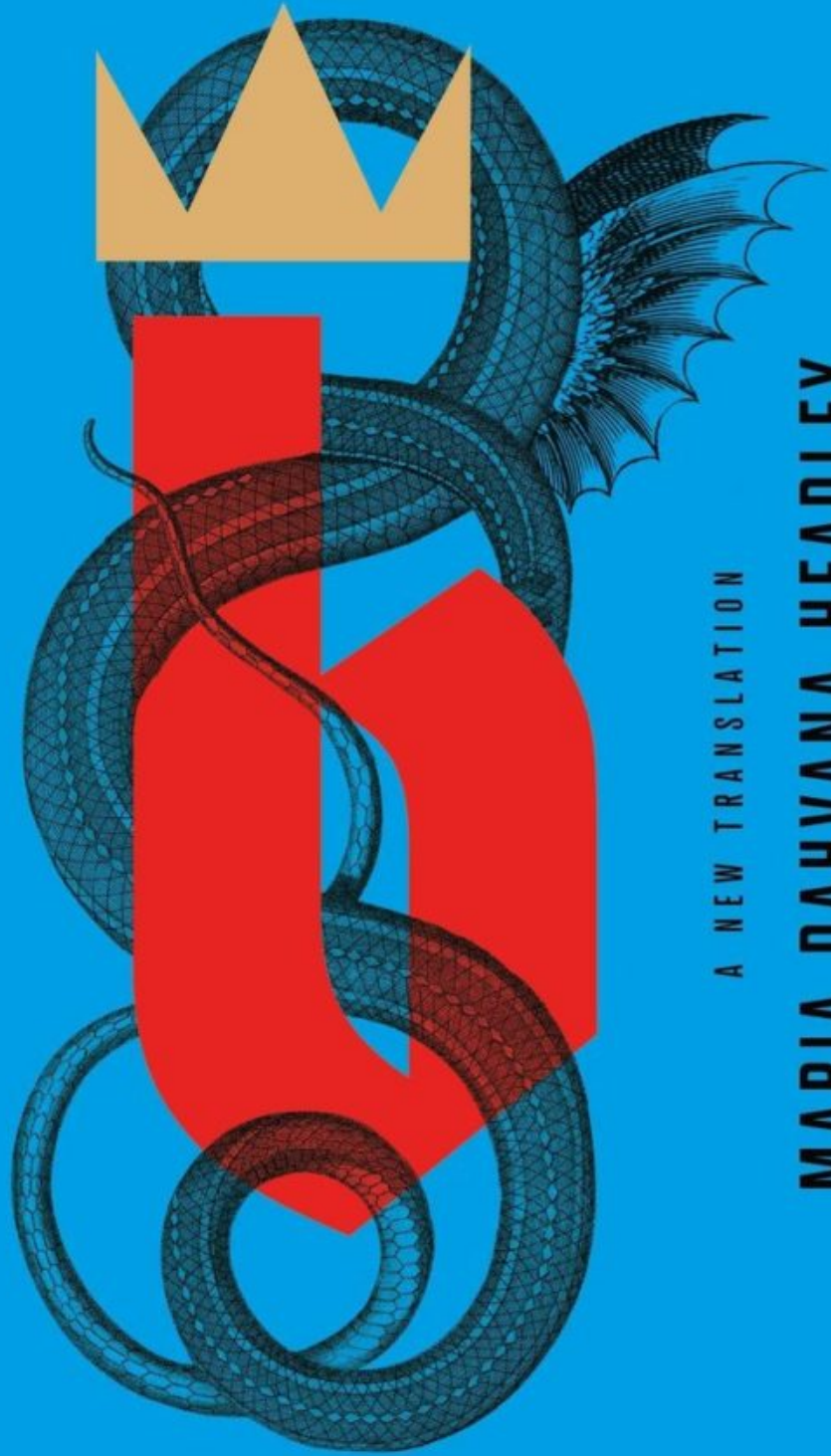


2020 was not really a year to engender optimism, but somehow, here we are. I made the best of it. Life in the bubble with Stanwyck and the dogs is damn near close to paradisiacal. We are all healthy. We have been burning fires on the patio and sitting at a distance with a few select visitors now and again. We had the kids home for Christmas for an extended stretch, all of us isolated and tested ahead of time so we could behave more or less normally.

As near as I can calculate, I read* at least 58 books last year (*five or six of these as audio books; does that count as reading?), several more than once. I went deep down the Faulkner hole. Tons of Civil War/Reconstruction history. I

listened to Alan Moore's *Jerusalem* start to end, which marks my third journey though that epic. It took several months of dog walking to make that trip, but Simon Vance's narration made it more than worth it. More on this later.

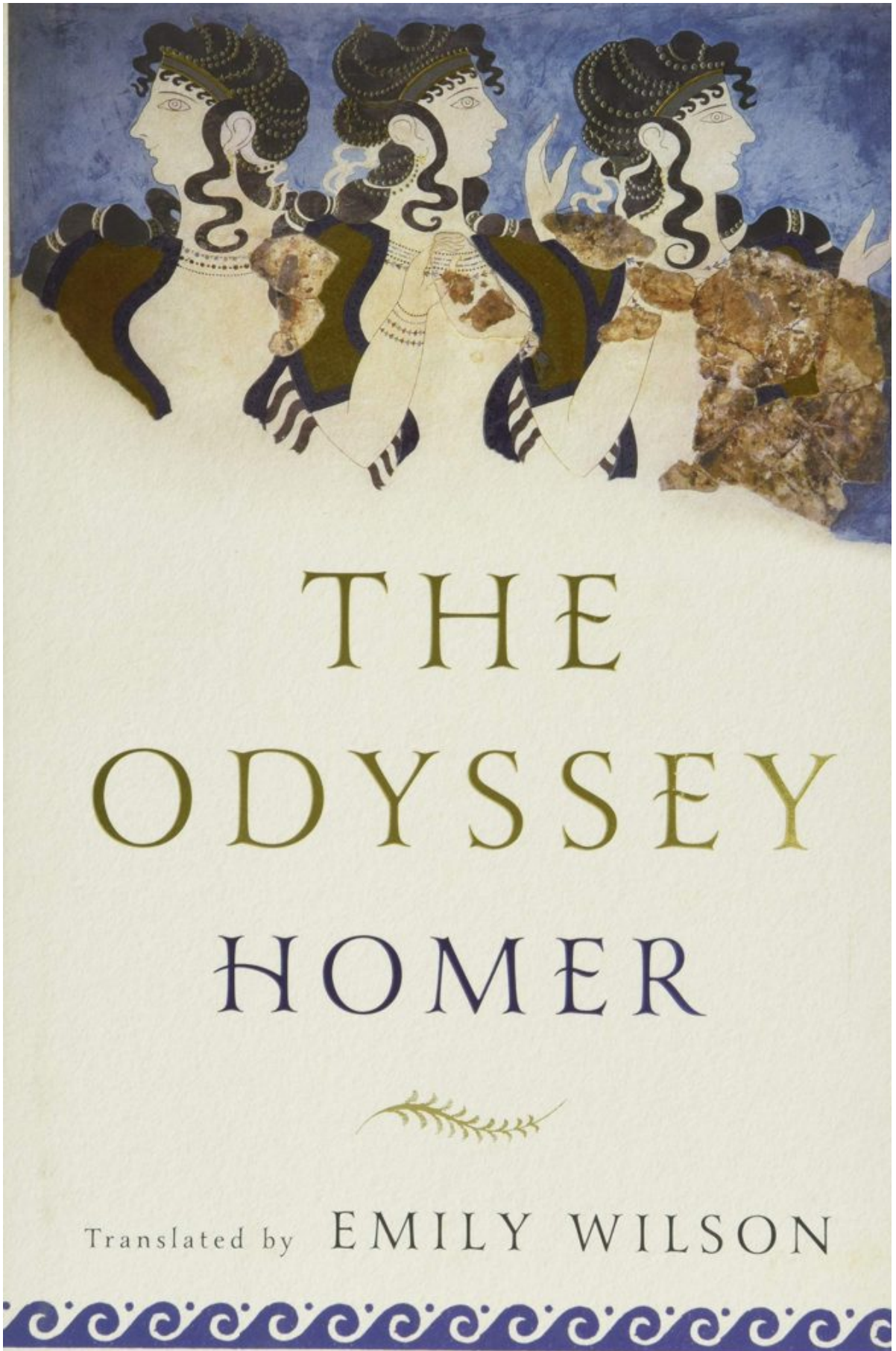
BEOWULF



A NEW TRANSLATION

MARIA DAHVANA HEADLEY

Old Stories...



New Voices

Some fab-o time spent in the company of Beowulf and Odysseus

via new translations, both re-imagining a less male-centric attitude to the tales. And JD Jackson's narration of *Beowulf* is killer. (Not quite as taken by Clare Dane's recitation of Homer. Whaddyagonnado?)

Shortlisted
**The
Booker
Prize
2019**

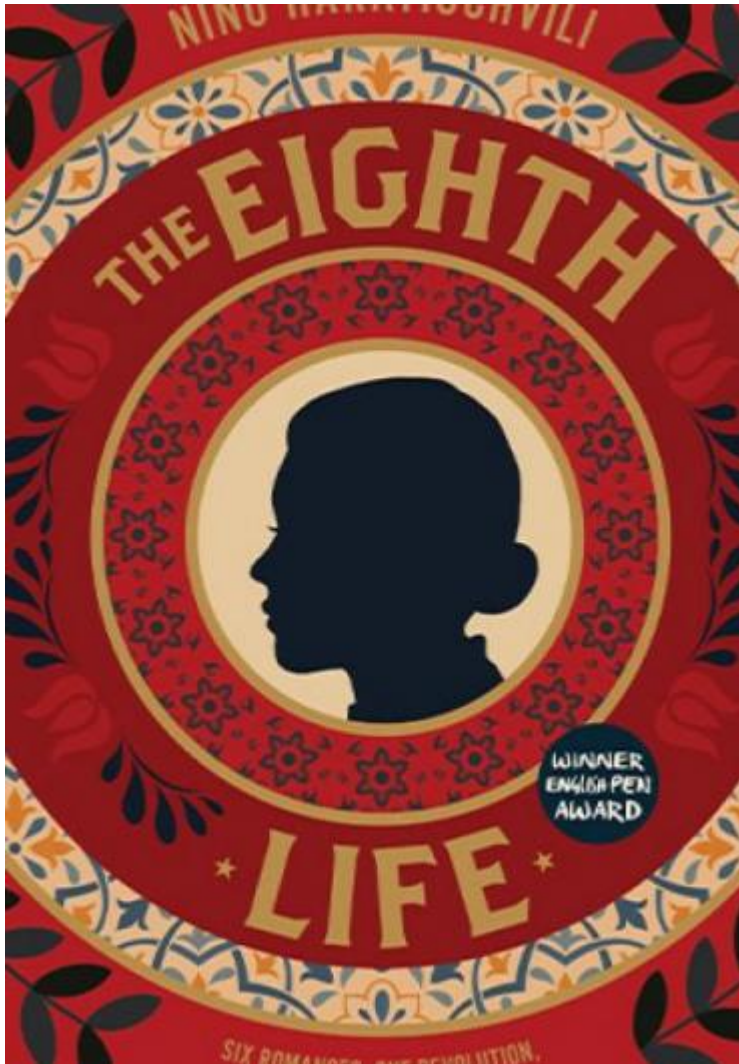
Ducks, Newburyport

Lucy Ellmann



“Unstoppable ... like nothing you’ve ever read before.”

—Booker Prize Jury citation



A couple of other gargantuan epics. (I like big books and I cannot lie.) These were both fantastic in their way. *Ducks* is a tough sled, a little north of 1000 pages and largely a single sentence. Brilliant, Joycean wordplay and narratively as daring as anything I've ever read. Once I caught the rhythm, it was un-put-down-able. But I refuse to recommend this book to anyone. It is nothing like an easy read, and I've endured enough resentment for my advocacy of *Infinite Jest*.

The Eighth Life, otoh, is a must for anyone who loves the epic Russian narratives of Tolstoy/Dostoyevsky &c. Sprawling across a century and 950 pages, this is a tale of the Bolshevik Revolution, Stalinism, and beyond, centered in Georgia. Both *Ducks* and *Eighth Life* made the Booker Prize list.

Toss in a hefty bundle of sci-fi and apocalit, and the

occasional trifling indulgence pulper redolent with corpses and impressive gams, and I had a big year in the pages. Very little rhyme or reason to it all, just following my instincts and engaging in the occasional spasm of book review-induced buying sprees. Two books down so far in 2021 with a couple of doorstoppers (*Warmth of Other Suns* and Obama's latest) underway.

Which brings us out of the pages and into the material world.





At Stanwyck's instigation/inspiration (pushed along by some recently discovered wood rot across/through/under the living room floor), we have tackled some household projects, and the place has never felt better, inside and out. It was a rough two months being displaced from the primary living area (damage was way extensive), but we survived and had the place back in shape for the holidays and cold weather. At least we could live in the house, unlike the shit show of last Fall.

The neighborhood remains a tree-canopied haven for bird life – like those wood storks up top of this post. Long walks with the dogs are easy enough to manage without bumping into other people. Distancing comes pretty easy for us. We got really good at it during the cancer episode; I was due for “normal” social interaction about the time the COVID took over the world in March. We just kept on keeping on the way we'd already done since the previous March. Really hoping we wrap this up well before we hit the three-year mark, but the vax progress so far is not very impressive. I expect the critical

mass necessary for free-movement in the U.S. is at least 6 months away, and probably much longer for much of the world. Hope I'm wrong.

Hermit life suits us, it appears, though we cannot last forever this way. We miss people. I miss sitting in a pub or café and pretending to write. I miss live music. We really miss pointing the car down the road and following it wherever. We have not missed eating out that much, finding that the food we make is generally better and cheaper than the fare on offer at most eateries, but we do miss having dinner out (or in) with friends.

So here's to being able to get together soon. In the meantime, please stay tuned to i2b and share whenever you think it is worth the distribution. I'll be working on a new subscription/alert function and for some way of letting comments back in without being flooded by bots. Some re-design is also long overdue. The kids in the banner photos are darn near unrecognizable.

Someday baby, who knows what the wind blows. At least I got a new Blog Motto and home page banner photo up there. Suitable for framing in 2021.

**Further Adventures in
ApocaLit**



Earlier this year I wrote about a few examples of ApocaLit I had been reading as the world seemingly bursts into flame around us. I have continued to mine this vein of things-are-fucked-up-and-bullshit entertainments. Is this a strategy of face the beast head on or escape the beast by engaging a substitute? Works for me either way.

The looming specter of a great contagion or disaster that destroys civilization is as old as time: the Epic of Gilgamesh, Noah and the flood, the Revelations, Boccaccio's *Decameron*, Defoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year*, &c. My recent readings have been not quite that old: Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* (1826) and Jack London's *The Scarlet Plague* (1915).

The Shelley and London books provide instructive examples of the limitations of speculative/sci fi written in any period. Both books take place c. 2073. For Shelley, that year is the beginning of the end, which (Spoiler!) culminates in the narrator as the last surviving human in 2100, wandering barefoot and revenant. For London, the plague arrived in 2013 and pretty well wiped out all but a sliver of humankind in a matter of months; our narrator is telling a gang of feral lads about what things had once been like, before.

One notable feature is how the authors could not imagine too far beyond the prevailing technological norms of their times. For Shelley, this means a total absence of rapid communication, transport almost entirely via horse and buggy or on horse back, and continued reliance on candles and torches. The language is High Romantic, and at 375 pages it is an overdose of the lofty, enough to make one wish for the sweet release of the plague itself.

Example: The narrator has been infected and is sure to die. (Spoiler: He is one of the few to survive and gain immunity.) He flies to his beloved (because of course he did) and over the course of three pages, this flowery tosspot goes on a Romantic tear, finally spilling the tea: He has the plague. They clasp hands and heave their bosoms, likely while bringing the backs of their hands to their troubled brows.

There are indeed moments when a heartfelt “Yo girl, you know I love you so much, but I’m dying yo” would be more apt. But alas, and forthwith, we have Lionel Verney as a guide, not Jason Mendoza.



Now that there is some romancin’

Shelley was working out some deep personal trauma with this book, written in the wake of her beloved Percy’s death by drowning. Frankly, I do not recommend this book as a casual escape from our own looming worries, unless you just love you some High Romantic puffery. The first half of the book is plague-free, and Shelley paints the idyllic scene of meadows and glade and Nature’s wondrous bounty and depicts Percy and Byron pretty clearly in her two main protagonists. All is bliss and crashing ennui.

Since you are not going to read this anyway, here’s the book’s secret. By this time in her life, Shelley is well and truly over the glory of nature riff. Her man is dead, and the world is bleak. More than any real attempt at speculative fiction – hell, everybody still holds Shakespeare and Haydn as the exemplars of cultural achievement – this book is Mary Shelley taking the piss out of Percy’s and Byron’s childish fantasies. Read in that light, there is a certain sharp edge to her mimicry of the High Romantic folderol. But the joke is way inside, and suffers to sustain several hundred pages.

(To be fair to Shelley, she was indeed a badass in many ways. After *Last Man*, I went back and re-read *Frankenstein* (1818)

for the first time since high school, and it just. fucking. rocks. She wrote it on a challenge between Byron, Percy, and herself to see who could come up with the scariest story. She won. She was 20. Bad. Ass. Those boys had no idea who they were dealing with.)

Jack London, on the other hand, gets right to the point and whipsaws us through the tale of disaster in a brisk 160 pages. London was an unapologetically commercial writer; intent on making a buck to buy the next bottle of hooch. These days, London is remembered chiefly as a writer of adolescent adventure fantasy, best known for his Alaska potboilers and other tales of derring do. But he was also a socialist activist, taking every opportunity to slip rad ideas into his stories. Yet another visionary unfairly derided for his 'genre fiction'.

(His book *The Iron Heel* (1908), one of the earliest dystopian novels of authoritarian horror, is terrific. Get it. It predates Orwell and Huxley by a longshot, and is a good fifteen years before Soviet dissident Yevgeny Zamyatin published *We* (1924), which both Huxley and Vonnegut lifted pretty much intact for *Brave New World* and *Player Piano*. To his credit, Vonnegut happily admitted the theft. Not our Aldous.)

London's plague chronicle takes a more robust stab at the sci-fi/speculative realm than Shelley. Granted, he had the advantage of another century of 'progress' to draw upon. There are aspects of global communication and air travel, but the narrative is still trapped in an early-20th century framework. (*Iron Heel* was much more successful in its imaginings of future 'improvements'.)

Unlike pioneer speculators like HG Wells and Asimov, or later savants like PK Dick and William Gibson, neither of these writers managed to extrapolate much beyond their own near-horizons. This is not a complaint so much as it is to

acknowledge how difficult it can be to really imagine something that does not yet exist. The people who successfully anticipated changes that eventually arrived are notable exceptions. (See also the proliferation of flying cars that look like shark-finned Chevy and Cadillac models from late 50s speculative efforts. Not to mention the speculative brassieres that seemed cut from the same template!)

I read the London as I was halfway through Shelley. I needed a break from the “O mighty heavens that span above like a twinkling etc.” It’s a quick read, and really fun, too. The narrator was once a professor of literature, probably at Berkeley. (London loved the Bay Area settings.) After the plague did its job, he became a wanderer, member of one tribal group or another as necessity demanded. As he begins his tale around a campfire, his speech is raw, unadorned. But as he gets going, he falls back into his professorial mode, much to the aggravation of the feral teens he is addressing.

“Why do you have to use made up words like ‘scarlet’? Can’t you just say red?”

But our man is undeterred, and as he carries on, his original love for the humanities rekindles, and he enthuses about the aspects of what was lost. He talks of finding a library during his lonely wanderings, sounding as wistful as Henry Bemis. He implores his young friends to hear his pleas to learn to read and write and to commit to preserving the best of humanity’s works. All but one boy wanders off laughing at him.

It may seem perverse to find solace in these sagas of collapse (fwiw, *Mr Robot* was a deep obsession here at the casa this spring, and the latest pair from William Gibson is a ripping yarn), but it can be comforting to see how relatively not-awful our situation is compared to the fevered speculations of these tales of societal disintegration.

Because it could never get as bad as all that. Right?

Stanwyck Read the News Today, Oh Boy!



TALLAHASSEE, FL: BREAKING NEWS

A rarely seen wave of mass happiness, hope, and relaxation spread across Florida's Capital City this weekend as citizens embraced the return of competence, character, and decency to the White House.

Long thought to be on the verge of extinction, some scientists believe this leading wave indicates the end of a long drought both here and around the nation.

Recently transplanted Florida Man and two-time loser of the popular vote for the Presidency has gone into seclusion. Aides suggest he just needs time to tend to his bruised fee-fees and urge all Americans to "just let him stay for a while longer until he feels ready."

While Biden supporters reacted with joy, elation, and tears of relief, partisans of the two time loser reacted with their sole reliable emotional mechanism: inchoate rage and anger against Those People™. As has been demonstrated for the past four years, these outbursts run the gamut from demented to slapstick...

Yes indeed, we're feeling pretty good here in America's most penis-like state, despite the fact that more than half of our citizenry voted for four more years of incompetence, graft, and cruelty. Not to mention 70 million or so people across the country.

As always when Democrats win (or lose) the punditocracy comes along to remind us how important it is for us to treat our vanquished foes with empathy and a spirit of compromise so that we might "come together" in a great squish of kumbaya.

Bollocks, I say. All of them.

I get it, the disappointment when your team comes up short. But Jesus Christ on late night television, people. The idea that we not only have to forgive the unhinged abuse of the past four years – when the Trump dead enders can't even concede the fact that they've lost – well, no, sorry. Forgiveness is earned through contrition.

And I'll say straight up: Anyone who voted for Trump – especially this time around, after everything that was predicted about a Trump presidency was proved both true and unexaggerated – has a lot to atone for. Especially when the prevailing justification for a second term was to stick it to the libs.

As for anyone who worked to keep this nightmare alive – from the lowliest GOP hack (did someone say Evan Power) to the elected GOP toadies and the careerist stooges who enable them – please to kindly fuck off and go to work cleaning bedpans in COVID wards for the next four to forty years. There is no room for you in decent society.

Kumbaya my ass.

Over the past four years, the dark politics of resentment have been unleashed upon our land. Nakedly cruel and often violent expressions of racism and nationalism have been given

permission to run free. I fear that those elements, back out of the box after such a long-deserved period of hiding shamefully under the rocks, will not go away without at least a few horrific tantrums. Am I really to clasp hands with someone who spent four years counseling me to fuck my feelings when he has a long gun on his shoulder, "just in case".

Let's say no.

On the lighter side, some of the reaction has been well ripened comedy. One commenter encapsulated the zeitgeist when he declared his willingness to die for Trump, his unwillingness to live under a "communist" like Biden, and absolute plans to leave the United States behind before it becomes a communist nation. His declared destination?

Guam.

Who's gonna tell him? Maybe he could try New Mexico next.

In the meantime, WH sources tell reporters that Trump plans a series of his famous rallies to gin up the rubes once more to empty their pockets and expose themselves to COVID. One can only hope that any venue contacted will demand payment up front, and that local authorities will demand a security bond. Trump is notorious for stiffing his creditors, especially when his enterprise is struggling and he is drowning in debt. Like now.

Maybe there is a Ritz Carlton Seed and Feed barn or a LaQuinta Import Food warehouse he can afford.

As for the awesomely timed Four Seasons* press conference televised synchronously with the declaration of Biden's victory, well, I just gotta say it almost made the four days of waiting worth the agita to see the coup de grace delivered – upon a campaign that began on a faux-gold escalator – in a landscaper's parking lot between a dildo shop and a crematorium. For all the ludicrous turns this drama has taken,

the writers should take a well-earned bow on that one.

[LATE BREAKING: The first speaker at the Four Seasons Landscaping and Donut Emporium rally turns out to be a convicted child sex offender. I have to say this particular plot twist is a bit heavy handed, but maybe he's the only guy Rudy could find to help him "tuck his shirt in". No word from Qanon on whether there is a secret passage behind the fertilizer display.]

In the meantime, suggestions are rampant that Biden prove his willingness to unify the country by appointing people like John Kasich to his administration, a man whose distance from actual Trump policy could fit on a pin head like Marco Rubio. It's a good time to remind ourselves that the great majority of Never Trumpers barely differ with the Orange Grifter on any substantive policy questions: from taxes to deregulation to the packing of the judiciary with Federalist Society clones to tickling the balls of the NRA fundies, the GOP – even if purged of the less polite elements – will remain an autocracy wannabe, theocratically based kakistocracy. Pretending otherwise just because Rick Wilson's eyes twinkle when he savages Trump is pure foolishness.

And god save us from Blue Dog types who are floating names like Rahm Emanuel and the like.

The early and typical sniping within the Democratic Party is entirely predictable aside from the refreshingly sharp articulation from progressives like AOC who know how to push back and refute the oatmeal-consistency whining from DNC-approved centrists. This internecine bickering is a fine way to undo the mobilization that brought out the unprecedented numbers of BIPOC voters who turned this election.

James Baldwin famously said, "As long as you think you're white, there's no hope for you."

The chips are down, America. As long as you cling to the

notion that this is a white nation, there is no hope. I suspect Biden understands this. If not, I'm confident Kamala will be at the ready to correct him.