

BPJ

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THE LOGIC OF YOO

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TERRA ANTHROPOLOGICA

Elska is not a word I expect you to know
but to someone in Iceland it is love, which is also
nothing I expect you to know, but means
etymologically there is steam under the earth
which may gush from its fissures any time day or night
but often when no one is watching, not even the stars
caring either, their white light glowing
with an aloneness no one even knows to feel sad about.

Or maybe we would be floating there
like John White searching for his daughter
in our fragile *barque* just off the coast
& for the first time in a century we would see
the earth cracking its seam just a bit & the steam
would seem like the earth sighing,
& the waves lapping over the gunwales
would feel less cold than they really are,
& the mist like a
tongue like a
palm like an
aureole
like nothing after you've died would rain.

Oh! I know I go on
too much, all
gathered into the prow so we might sink,
but I want us to watch & imagine
in our human way
that the light is for us, when I know it is not, though at least
I am for you. Do you forgive me
my fecklessness,
this indolence of too much & too many?
Inside, something touches my tongue that might
be a cloud, or might also be just stone.
Always this pressure under the earth must explode.

EMAIL

Date: Friday, Feb. 25, 2011 4:32AM
To: #5@Academicwritinghelp.com
From: Dianthus@ranney.edu
Subject: senior thesis paper

Dear Writer #5,

I need a paper write away—48 hours actually. I've been accepted to Harvard! I bet you don't hear that too much. I am such an idiot for letting it get this late, but I think my proctor suspects me, so I tried to write it on my own, but then, what the f###, this system wasn't made for me, or I for it, I don't know. If I don't have this paper, then I'm not going anywhere, and I've soooooo wanted to go to H, since before I was born, my father says. My name's not really Dianthus, but if you'll just send me the thesis without the name, I can format the title page and the header myself. Is that ok? Is that how this works? Tell me if no, as I'm very flexible.

Anyway, you need to know what I need. Have you ever heard of John C. Yoo? You probably read the news all the time. I don't have any time for the news myself, though I like to read history—probably my major. Mostly memoirs. Did you read Bush's memoir? I think it was called Flash Points. Anyway, I need 30 pages, double spaced, MLA style, with at least a dozen citations, including a “good number” of primary and database sources (my proctor said he would know a “good number” when he saw it; what does that mean to you?).

Just make sure it's an argument. I don't care which side you take, but you have to prove a point. Yoo was a writer, like YOU! Get it? lol :) I think he wrote something about why we need to torture terrorists, so I'd like you to take that position. I'd do it myself, but I just couldn't read all that legalize. Didn't make sense to me. You'll get it. Anyway, you can text me this weekend if you have questions (though I probably won't know the answer!) I look forward to the finished product, a work of art.

Anxiously,
“Dianthus”

THE LOGIC OF YOO

1

He had agreed to write the paper, as he had the others,
though he knew little of Yoo & nothing of the student
who had requested it, who would pay for it,
top dollar this time since it was a rush job requiring
citations, an upper-level thesis, an original work of art,
though he wouldn't define art that way, but the student had
& the student was boss, brought in the cash
& the student had a working title, "The Logic of John C. Yoo,"
some ideas, too, as to the arguments the paper should make,
which begged the question why didn't the little punk
just write it herself? But then he would be out of a job
& he reminded himself that this wasn't a student
but a client who was owed a product & he was just a prole,
a cipher & what the client did with it was her business.

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2

Charging three whites & two reds to his American Express
the 30-ish man with the slight paunch slouched out of Eros Liquors
& crossed the street, not looking for traffic, hugging his
brown bag to his chest to stop the pounding or maybe
to keep it going, walked up the block, past
Acapulquenos Mexican Grill, past the shuttered gas station,
the Public Works yard, a dull thread of bottles
knocking together & then turned onto the grayed packed-dirt path
leading through the woods to his apartment building, stepping over
the emptied Red Bulls & other trash in his way, keeping a sure grip,
his fingers laced together now around the bag, until fumbling
for his keys, one knee balancing the package, he pushed
open the front door. He went straight to the kitchen counter,
unpacked the wines, pulled the drapes, dropped two slices
of whole wheat bread in the toaster & surveyed
his catch: two Italians, one Californian, a French, a South African.
“A U.N. delegation,” he muttered to himself & in the half-dark
plotted which landscape to overthrow first.

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3

He slipped the red into the white, made a pink,
though depending on the ratios, the colors changed:
rosy, fuchsia, carmine, magenta, hot,
Barbie, coral, salmon, ruby, shocking, cherry blossoms in spring,
flamingos & their algae, Dorothy's tights,
pink of the dianthus, its frilled edges, thus the pinking shears,
crossways pattern, interminably one-way, but never
in the same direction. They were innumerable, at least
in theory, one atom more or less changing the shade,
refracting the light differently, since it was really the light
& not the wine, though what he could perceive,
what his eyes would allow, was only a certain number,
maybe 100, give or take, until he forgot what pink was,
whether it had any real substance & then
he just went back to thinking gray, bottles empty,
poured down the sink, where the wine would mix with water
at the Public Works, those chemicals, then disappear.

4

Starting a new project he always listened to music,
mostly grunge rock, Pearl Jam & Nirvana, the Seattle
scene & it reminded him of the U-District,
from Ravenna down to Portage Bay, Dick's Drive-In
open till 2 a.m., where he had read French & sipped coffee
before his comprehensives, CNN playing in the corner
over the grill, screeching brain-numbing music
like he heard the first troops had played in their APCs
raging into Baghdad, hearts holding their breath inside their
metal jackets, though the city was quiet, the world too,
which reminded him of the Stevens poem, until later,
he now knew, when the screeching outside burst
over the gunwales, the APC a struck-and-foundering Pequod,
& here he pulled down his *OED*, the *wale*,
a ridge of stone or flesh, a *dicwale* in Old English,
on ða eastlangan dicwale, on that eastward stony ditch,
dying there, while he had read *Je voudrais pas crever*,
Boris Vian, *I would like not to explode* & ate cold fries.

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5

So he set to work in the dark, buttered bread
& booted his Mac, the client's requirements
spelled out on clean paper & he circled
what he would have to prove, the number of citations,
their style, the tone, the approximate argument,
what \$1000 would buy: coffee & cigarettes
(he only smoked when he worked), his month's
rent & other bills, celebratory martini at the Ram's Head
when it was done & if he was charming, maybe
a girl there he could bring back & read French to
before she fell asleep. Then another paper after that,
maybe medical this time, something pulmonary, breathing
coming easier to him now despite the smokes,
something in his chest loosening, finding each paper
juiced the soul, let the tether out further, enlarged the scope
of what it owned & what it could do.

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6

He had heard of this John C. Yoo, what he had written while soldiers packed black-hooded men into planes & wondered how far they could go, when it would be too much & for how long it could be endured, but Yoo was a bartender, a mixologist, making adjustments—too sweet, too bitter—so skilled (is this what one knew after Harvard & Yale?) at jiggers & proofs, siphoning cheap vodkas into designer blue bottles, switching labels on the Johnny Walker—Red to Black.¹ The hoods were not for the prisoners. The hoods were not the opposite of maps or the soldiers' names, which were already blank. The hoods were a permission. Lights dimmed, music cupping its sonorous white hands around the prisoners' ears, it was easy not to meet the eyes, just to look at the lines in the grain of the bar, serve up the shots. What was war, what evil, what measurements could be brought to bear?

¹ Matt Labash, "The Passion of Dick Cheney," *Weekly Standard*, 22 September 2008, sec. 14, 2. In an interview, the Vice President reveals that his Scotch of choice is Johnny Walker Red.

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U.S. Code
Section 2340A:
“torture is an act
committed by a person
intended to inflict
severe
physical
or mental pain
and suffering
(other than pain or
suffering
incidental to lawful
sanctions)”

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Of course, there were the “torture memos,”
which could signal, if they were metaphoric, the little notes
his wife had left him taped above the kitchen sink
reminding him what he hadn’t done, how his shaking in bed
had become intolerable, his dreams
in which he woke himself with muted howls
more than the treaty of their marriage had demanded.
But Yoo was a literalist. Bound, gagged, shoved
& pinned in a dark box where lay the soft-green tarantula
the torturers had named *A. Gonzalez*, Yoo could
argue his way out & the spider would think itself wrong.
What was evil to him? He wrote of Remarque’s
untrammelled sovereignty of chance.² Said the peacenik
was wrong. Said intent meant *no one would be blamed*.

² John C. Yoo and Robert Delahunty, “Peace Through Law? The Failure of a Nobel Experiment,” *Michigan Law Review* 106 (2008): 924.

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OED

definition of “severe”:

grievous
—Bybee³

“knowledge alone
that a particular result
is certain to occur
does not
constitute
specific intent.”⁴

³ Jay S. Bybee, memorandum for Alberto Gonzalez, Counsel to the President, “Re: Standards of Conduct for Interrogation . . . ,” 1 August 2002, 5. As Assistant Attorney General Bybee’s deputy in the Department of Justice Office of Legal Counsel, Yoo references this “torture memo” in his letter to Gonzalez issued the same day insofar as “it more fully explain[s] our reasoning.”

⁴ Memorandum, 4.