The Abstract Humanities

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1

On August 14th, 1971, when they arrest Justin Smith on Rose St.,
his neighbors don’t know he’s a subject
in the Stanford Prison experiment, and Justin himself
doesn’t know that within 36 hours of dunking his head
into that fake cop car that he will have a mental breakdown
even though he keeps telling himself “This isn’t real.”

Daumier’s The Third-Class Carriage. This isn’t real.

Turnitin.com. This isn’t real.

Bingham’s Fur Traders Descending the Missouri.
This isn’t real. In solitary confinement he thinks
of his grandmother, Pearl, the only woman who
has loved him unconditionally,
and he finally recognizes Todd,
the guard, as the student who sits in the row
in front of him in biochem. Our quiz will be on
Ludwig van Beethoven’s “Pathetique,”
Charles Darwin’s theory of natural selection.

On destiny, 35.

On disillusionment, 543.

On empires, 96. On imperialism, 467.

2

Do you know how many of Karl Marx’s
children starved to death?
Yes, but he kept a maid.

Do you know the difference between pity
and compassion? This isn’t real.

Do you know the difference
between compassion and empathy?
I am bleeding.

It is easy to be empathic and lack compassion
but sometimes a person is compassionate and lacks
empathy. The limit-case being a saint or
martyr. To write the most tender poem for Karl Marx, which includes the Torah or rather the light of the Hebrew alphabet which casts its glyphs on one of Rembrandt’s apple cider, wide-eyed walls.

3
Do not write “luminous glyphs” for it is overly Romanic. Do not write a love poem to Karl Marx, for you might lose your job. Do not talk about compassion, for this is not a temple. Do not use the word “tender,” for this is art and art must be cold like money or a fish. Do not say you’re a Jew, for you never know who is reading. Do not place the word “money” next to the word “Jew” for people will think that all you care about is money, Jew.

4
It has been fifteen years since my mother tried to kill herself. There is no way into the abstract humanities. In the experiment, Todd beats Justin. You can only follow me so far, but when we get to the river, Horatio, you will not be able to cross through my particular hourglass: Ubermensch 468, Ulysses 533, Un Chien Andalou 552. It is hard to believe that I found her. It is hard to believe that I lived in that apartment with my mother and sister.
It is hard to believe that I was at her side in the hospital. The bourgeoisie are so self-destructive! That’s the real secret of the *Communist Manifesto*. On the phone she says, “Why do you think about things that happened so long ago?”

5

Horatio also says, let the past be the past, doomsday, doomsday. Zeno, Zeno.

Zen philosophy, 596.

Let the peasant in this painting reap what she sows, and if nothing comes of nothing, Zero, Zero, let the mother of the third-class carriage’s weeping hands over woven basket, infant to the nipple, rest unseen.