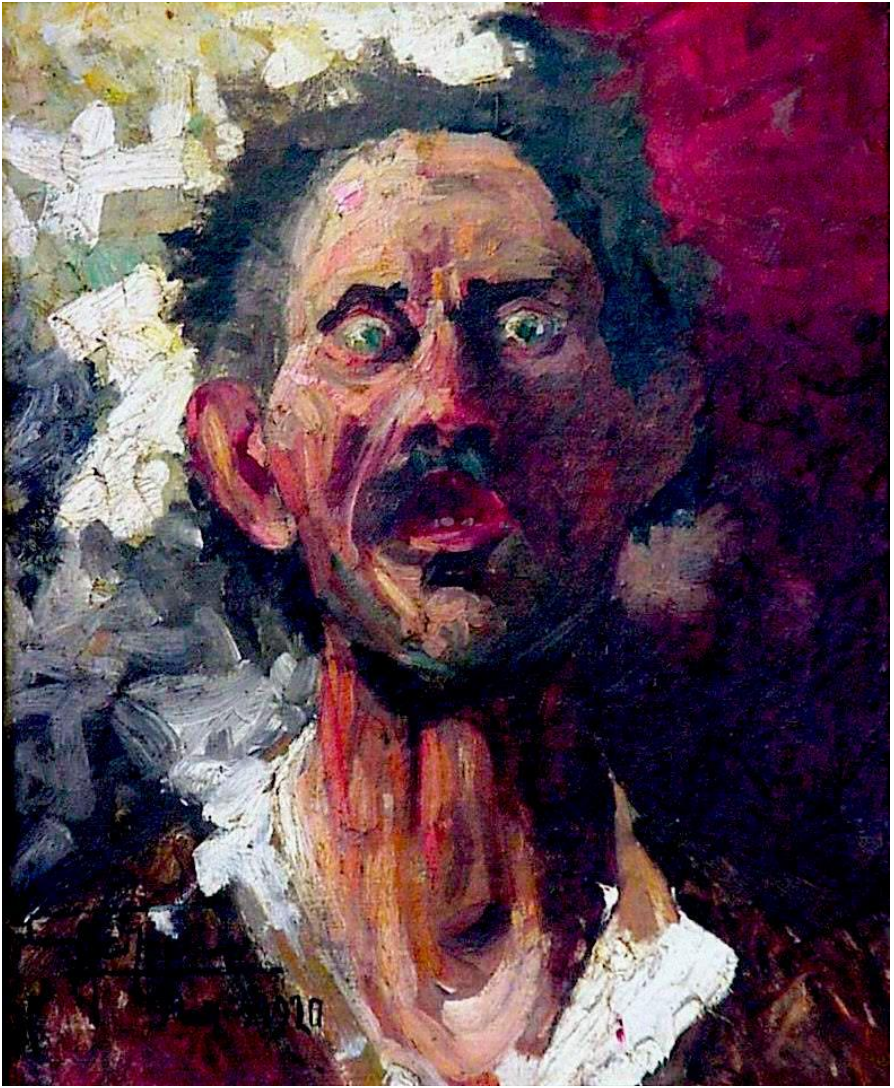


THE O:JA&L 2023 CHAPBOOK SERIES
EXPERIMENTAL DISCOURSE (XP)

SIX COFFEES WITH A MADMAN



BLOSSOM HIBBERT

BUTTONHOOK PRESS

A WRITER'S PORTFOLIO: BLOSSOM HIBBERT

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Cover Image: *The Crazy Man from Chevillat* by Antonio Parreiras (1860-1937). Oil on canvas. 17.7 x 14.6 inches.
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Restless, I down the mud and head out for an urban pier walk. I am better off in perpetual ligament movement; my fibroblasts detest stagnation; even rest of the subtle kind. We walk the plank hand in hand, something squirms inside my lovely mushy tummy.

Since his death this morning, explanations have become extremely important to him. Over the crash of blacky ink, he describes

Why

belonging is survival (and)
survival is belonging

It would take a landslide of small, shrivelled brown beans hurtling down Belvoir street to make us move. He knows I need him; I cling to his thin body like an armchair newspaper, listening out for complaints. Frightened, we head back to the café; him, hidden in my bag, that is to say, half hidden – for don't his eyes stare through the tough white cotton into my optic nerve.

Stare.... Why do you stare?

##

##

I order a warm croissant with jam, and another **hot coffee**.

My father's absence lies on the train tracks and prevents me moving any further. If he were a freelance carpenter, I would ask him to build me a bookcase and single bed and a table for my lover to rest his hat on.

But he is neither a father nor a carpenter, so it doesn't matter much. He is an outline on a train track headed south.

I miss lover already. To make this all better I sketch him on a napkin, ripping the friable fabric when I shade in the coat. I scratch the inside of my elbow till I bleed a bit. When I am finished scratching skin and tissue, I sit back to look at MY masterpiece.

I have painted him crying a single worm of solitude. I do not sketch again.

I now know **far too much**.

The Curse of Knowledge is the passage from infant to adult. I am somewhere along the way.

I remove the man from the bag. **Now**, he can only view life through the bars of prison. He is resentful at restriction, this will never, ever change. I have permanently altered a stranger's outlook. Yes!

Taking the gold spoon from saucer, I hide eyebrows. This simple change dares me to care for something small and vulnerable that usually, I would like to kill. Croissant crumbs fall out my mouth onto his trench jacket and I commit a multitude of sins to wipe them away. My hand slips and his eyebrows pop up/ spring bulb/ jack-in-a-box/ drowning head in deep water. He is deathly angry under all that gold. Es muss sein, darling boy.

Caffeine begins to press against the infected valves of my heart. No one looks through the peephole before letting it all flood in. It is **far too late now**.

SIX COFFEES WITH A MADMAN

He enters The Atrium of my heart.

MY ATRIUM?!? I sip the cold coffee ends in disbelief, almost choke on the dregs, but manage not to. I am such a **brave little girl**.

The long coat I once admired is stuck to my pulmonary artery, blood pressure undulates. *Lub wush dub, lub wuuush dub...*

Increasingly unsure of my own self-worth, I wipe the tear off my cheek using the back of four fingers and the skin shifts off my cheekbone.

I have had enough excitement/ xylazine to last seven years. Placing the man back into the bag with my lightest head, I ignore strange stares, then head out - an explorer of emotion, traveller of milky truth and thinker of universal expansion. There is no evidence to suggest we are not the only two living people in the world. For this reason, we clear our own plates away.

I grab my bag, my stethoscope, and my map. We have to go to the next city now, before we get too used to this one and have to live here.

FOREVER

COFFEE #2

THE NEXT CITY IS NO FUN. It is all rivers and mud and boats and sundials and wild ponies and apple orchards and Plath's grave (Hughes). We do not pick at the thread we left, instead put new sheets on the stripped bed and began the motions again. Today is the day for new beginnings! A river muscles by my feet, taunting me with excess strength. I tell my lover, do not worry, for I am even stronger than this river – I have **so many, hundreds of muscles.**

I am bursting with myocytes.

The frog laughs at me, and I...

Sip.
(mmm)

Looking at his hand, awestruck... simply and, may I admit, cleverly - redefine desire. It is no longer a strong feeling of wishing something to happen. It is no longer the blind man that craves sight.

In due course, I will write to the papers and let them know of this extraordinary discovery:

'Redefinition Of Bodily Desire'

I am the best columnist in all the land, I'm actually famous - I tell my framed lover. Actually, **really, QUITE** famous. I smoke menthol cigarettes with the celebrities, we crunch glass in bleeding mouths and dance on tables before the flies wake up. Tight trouser tango on the bathroom floor, noses full of stallions and eyes darting around, we talk all night long about how popular everybody is. Earnest forthcoming nips at our heels, but we humbly kick them away. Beige cocktail parties are kind of my thing, you know?

Really, rather famous... I glance back. He looks tremendous in this new location.

My love for this stranger sits in a neat space outlining his grey hand.

I do not touch it for fear of allowing the **tetanus** (which has been chasing me since birth) to get inside. The tetanus freezes your muscles in time, I am aware my photo frame man inherited the *clostridium tetani* when he was first created, so am careful not to upset him with my real lies (he will surely realise).

I know he has a heart of galvanized steel, so it will NEVER cease to beat inside his tense state. Poor, poor creature... I am so very kind and loving and sweet and **sensitive...**

If only inland revenue could see me now!

The taxman redefined society three years ago. Death of the working class was the political driving force. Turned us all into troglodytes, it did. Turned us into (pre)

socialites.

The hierarchy of rich and poor is something I wish neither to climb up nor slide down. I am happy where I am; in the coffee shop of beginners, sipping beside my blank lover. We don't let society hold us back. We don't let dentists hold us back. We sit only on **yellow chairs**.

I love the man in the frame according to how much I owe the bastard tax man.

It would take a million bumble bees to understand this new relationship I have formed with lover. A tumour squirms on the underside of my brain. We dream together.

Lying on your bed in some sunny afternoon, underneath the top floor room you rent from a socialite. Whilst you are out on shift, I am naked, wild, carrying children inside the dirty sheets of the evening. Using teeth alone, I think to split an atom exactly in half, stretching halves far apart until the universe collides inside bullet holes and my broken man comes staggering home to me, dinnerless and filthy. Mother of My Child, Stop Being So Naughty.

Only Kavan would understand me now.

And when I reach for his hand, I get exactly what I want. Shoelace tendons and bones from Sunday roast chicken sticking out.

I get exactly what I want.

Lay it all upon my ravished, drunken body, sunrise creature of mine. The landscape jolts me back to present tense.

River has been accustomed to CHANGE ever since the triceratops' great tongue licked the salt off the rocks. I am red with jealousy for this river beside me. I am boiling up with anger... How **dare** riverbanks be so used to transition, they wake up calm and placid and normal.

How **dare** CHANGE make me so **afraid**.

!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

All my unborn children have arranged a morning concert that I am late to. I am instead having a streetside coffee with a photo frame and I am running behind all rotten time. I tie my laces using his men's super-digital flexor tendons, so he can't run away from me, but I can. And boy, can I run *really* fast.

Carrying his children, we watch the sun heave itself up and clouds run away from us in the street of desire.

I drink black coffee rapidly/ inherit heartburn somewhat immediately.

I begin to whisper a prayer to my LORD.

I am the naughty girl that loves Jesus Christ.

My unborn children will sing me songs of Monmouth and Missy Higgins.
They will sing just to make me weep. My unborn children remain nameless
because of prostaglandin tablets eaten like sweets and codeine for the
chaser. I am the mother of the orchestra in the echoing moments before sleep
takes over – this is when I am naked, wet, and shaking.

My head is lost within the melody of the soldiers. My neck is lost to the toast
accompaniment. My egg is a fairy egg; yolkless, void of life. Not as delicious
for breakfast.

Baby, hold me tight, baby remind me I am not dead, and redemption is more
than outdoor gardening. Baby, give me something to take this rotten pain
away...

I must hurry up and spoil you/ greet you/ taste you. I must hurry up and be
the mother you couldn't be

(almost too late).

The new definition of desire has been written on the blackboard for the
pigeons to read, digest, read and worse... **remember.**

I desire complete unattachment most days. Not today, for today, I want to
find rope and tie us together. The pigeons might peck our eyes out, but we
won't care – we have **love!**

They will take over soon, you know. It will be **us** against **them**.

'**us**' = photo frame lover and the pigeons.

'**them**' = elephants, bubonic plague, mycelium, et cetera...

I am liminal, to the point I don't belong.

The picket line runs up my body and tickles. Giggling till I scream.

An American lady sits beside us.

We quieten down.

We have a normal discussion.

Hotels are ever so i t chhhhhy, lover, don't you just agree sweetheart baby
cowboy monster?

The river complains itself through the gutter of land, I am nonchalant about
the water and prove this with a quick whistle. I blow my nose on my scarf,
shifting my page boy fringe through nasal air currents.

Colonisation of the wet land is current and important and something the
politicians forget.

I **can** get used to change quicker than it feels. Just right now, it feels I won't
adapt and will instead freeze over. Just now, it feels like things are going to
last forever. The journey has only begun but it is going to last forever. Unease
is a dirty little trick.

Malaise is even worse.

I have aligned my view to the political preferences of sewer rats and realise...

I was wrong
 all along.

SIX COFFEES WITH A MADMAN

The referendum is futile! It will take me seven years to recover from the shock and when the mayor of Monmouth turns my life support off, I can finally exhale a lifetime of dirty rotten sins.

One last request before I go!

A red scarf please, for I have been warned the underworld is deathly cold.

The American lady says, 'have a lovely one' and I know she means *have a lovely death*

I know our love will surely last. If I just keep on loving.

We have to go to the next city now, before we get too used to this one and have to live here

FOREVER

COFFEE #3

WE HAVE MOVED across the country, again.
It is half two post meridiem.

Yawn.

Sleeping in a different bed every night proves a challenge, personal hygiene is the first to go. The bugs in my hair are starting to form a coalition, they are protesting **soap**.

They have organised an evening poker night and I am never invited. I pretend I don't care but stand outside the venue, cigarette trembling in my yellow fingers, eyes bulging. They dance naked on my eyebrows throughout the morning, as I famously danced on tables with Cohen and Tabucchi. Humph. This morning's ram shackle café is held together by lacquered wood and ground coffee and hot water. I've been told there aren't even any rams living here anymore, I don't believe it. We won't have long for this one - I get our coffee in blue takeaway cups and when he inevitably doesn't drink his I will be the lucky person - with

Two

Coffees!

The fragility of location shakes me, along with all this burdening responsibility of care.

He thinks I have a bad attitude but does not realise I am a child in desperate need for micturition, whispering perverse fantasies under my breath. Do not mistake me for the pope. I will go through a transatlantic personality change once I have urinated, however will not wash my hands because:

- 1) the bus is due to leave soon (no time)
- 2) germs are a commodity sold to us by the government to fund soap companies, which are coverups for illicit deals of the Class A Type (feed me, feed me!)

To start conversation, I tell him: the circus invited me to join on the walk here, whilst you slept. Because I'm wearing a green hat and have dog poo on my left shoe. I was running late for our morning coffee, so didn't go. Aren't I brilliant?

Suddenly, I realise I give up **so much** for this lover.

The martyr grins with stupid altruism.

He is a photo frame, and he is my baby, and he is bullet holes in the sky. If he loses me (he never will), I'll be searching for the best croissant in all the universe. We dream again.

Who are we to deprive Moses of his instinctual birth right? He often finds it hard to play house and is frighteningly vague about love. How can one be so foggy about desire, so complicit in failure?

The bus left without us.

We must wait for another going somewhere else, it doesn't really matter when location is futile and hungry children are swinging legs at the breakfast bar, waiting to be fed.

I am wonderful at looking after the creatures that are small and vulnerable and totally.

Insane.

We only keep moving because the crossword puzzle told us to. We only keep moving so the muddy water doesn't settle; God Forbids us to see through water. He hates translucency. As his little lambs, we have been ordered to keep things moving. He hates revolutions.

At least Lover and I have our morning coffee to rely on. That never changes. Travelling is keeping us young and beautiful and mortified.

On that note, it is probably time we get a move on, for I see a bus driver lifting his handbrake.

Itch itch.

We have to go to the next city now, before we get too used to this one and have to live here.

FOREVER.

COFFEE #4

HERE WE ARE AGAIN, lover and I.

We woke very early in a hotel room, full of bugs in our stomachs and detritus in our sinuses. So much weighing us down. His knees remained hidden in the trench coat under the blanket, but I knew they ached with infections.

(creeeaaaaak)

We woke with hope in our noses too, and, when I blew into a tissue it was green with dark red splodges all over. Who knew hope looks like hotel napkin gore?

We are having another hot hot coffee on the concrete outside the corporate lobby, and I am shivering with the cold wind rain.

The station is an ending just as much as a beginning. The station has **dementia** and can't remember who we are. Let us navigate all the terrible things together, lover and I – let us run away with hands in each other's pockets. I won't trip him up this time.

The rain king greets us, so we move inside. Why do you live in my bag? Is it because you are tall and powerful and everything I am not? Somebody eats strawberry yoghurt and watches me converse with my photo frame lover.

This café is for the yoghurt outcasts.

How about we stack our fists on top of each other and bash hard to make a dent in the table, so it remembers us always. So... when the café catches infectious **dementia**, we can remind him of all the fun we had together.

Why does Joni Mitchell not return my calls? I best call in to the papers with the extraordinary news she has died. I reckon it was painful and full of vile whispers. Society will weep inside the sycophantic circle.

It is a Sunday morning, so everybody sleeps whilst I scribble.

1) noise of pen on paper

2) radio aching

3) fish tank rejuvenating

4) tock tick, pulsing

I lost my conductor stick and instead use a breadstick.

My quartet doesn't know what to play.

Why is thinking so difficult?

I am a fresh pair of eyes on a hard kitchen chair, lifting my naked feet up because the tiles are cold. Drink the black sludge whilst it is hot and put an end to all that burned thinking.

Can I just create more money to fend off the taxman? I write him a poem about etiquette so he can learn a thing or two, I'll post it right now. Poetry is worth a thousand pennies.

Wait... before you go:

Both the station and I have **dementia**. Time won't look me in the eye anymore and I leave home very often without a plan for the day. I just

End up

I share one remaining wisp of thought with my photo framed lover. It is a comparison between dentists and builders.

The dentists use cement for root canal surgeries because it is cheap and creamy.

The builders use cement for telegraph poles because it is grey and sticks well into the gums of pothole streets.

I ask my lover if the streetcleaners can be the toothbrush?

Silently, he waits to be put back in my bag.

I sigh and accept defeat.

We have to walk to the next city now, before we get too used to this one and have to live here.

FOREVER.

COFFEE #5

HELLO AGAIN, loveeeerrrr.

We sit in everyone else's favourite seat; the olive-green sofa in the morning sunshine of the window. Everybody wants to sit here and 'do' the newspaper, we are colonising the rich, darling!

Go to your stupid poker night; it only gives us more time to steal your favourite seat. The coffee is bad and cold in the bar, tastes sort of like baked beans – but we have taken something from the middle class that cannot be destroyed. A favourite seat...

Ha ha ha!

Instead of the familiar pinprick night sky, we slept under a ringtone roof so we could be alone on our favourite morning with the maroon curtains **shut**. Didn't think we'd be sat in this part of the country, did you? Didn't think the manicured bed would be so comfortable, so warm and inviting. You have been a bit absent lately, are you alright, my madman?

Baby, **you** stutter all the time, and **you** are my only friend.

Oh, I made a mug of coffee for **you** but had to throw it into the compost heap because **you** weren't drinking it quick enough.

My breakfast tasted awful this morning because it wasn't with **you**. I have so many gustatory cells, millions fighting to taste the bean.

I understand we are all fighting the battle of the fittest and the hash browns are making my heart strong and legs muscular. That's why I ate it despite the bad taste. I am on both sides of liminal, remember. I ordered extra baked beans for 50p, but it tasted like coffee, so I piled it on the famous 1961 compost heap.

I am the silence after a child hits their head on the breakfast table.

I am the scream during stillborn labour.

I am in a buggy being pushed off a cliff. Is my mother sycophantic or sacrificial?

Why is our Lord the lamb of the past, why did we sacrifice him when he was the only hope we had in our old eyebrows? Was **he** the real victim of tax revenue?

The compost heap's guts are churning, I can hear the peristalsis from here. Keep it down banana skin, some of us are trying to figure out a plan to pay the taxman back with words. I am gas and bone and blood and muscle and awake and you are nothing but green, brown, black sludge. I will **always** be better than you.

Are you just a victim of trade?

The danger of poetry is yet to be discovered... lover be so, so
careful.

Kavan's warden is after me, along with the preacher of disbelief.
When you must put your trust in an unreliable, foolish narrator; things
become very tricky indeed.

entrenched with a lie/ pregnant with truth.

My old friend the wandering blues is back I must build myself a home to
show I am not afraid. I must buy hand carved mahogany side tables. And
dainty little egg cups.

My heart swells up when I glance upon neatly stacked bricks.

The taxman returned my letter, unopened. He probably has x-ray vision and
knew it did not contain a cheque. Some people are so highly strung, they
should take a break.

We must go again - to a place that has never seen my footprints. I hope my
feet are big enough and the photo frame doesn't embarrass me in front of the
strangers. I hope people are nice in the NewPlace and don't
laugh at me.

I have decided I will leave the mad Lover behind in the NewPlace and
continue the journey on my own. I don't tell him this, I keep it a soft secret.
He is just too crazy; his ramblings confuse me and make me terrified of
pigeons. No one should fear pigeons. Especially not **brave** me.

We have to go to the next city now, before we get too used to this one and
have to live here.

FOREVER.

COFFEE #6

GOOD FINAL MORNING

finally.

I sit on a wicker chair, my lover placed beside me – rather than facing each other, we sit side by side. It is easier to break horrible heartbreak side by side. We break bread.

Lover, **why** does the lord watch me **sin** and **giggle**?

Lover, the walls are closing in and the cowboy I am having a coffee with never learned how to ride a horse.

Lover, the pigeons are taking over the bags under my eyes are getting heavy and grey and I've started talking to a corpse. The bags beside my bed are packed with important bits.

only mad girls sleep
beside a wicker basket
of
clean pigeon bones
to
reconstruct her
friends
in the
afterlife.

I have a long way to travel before I can fall asleep. There is nothing I wish to own/catch/steal besides the **OLD** picture frame man; unspoiled by matters of the heart and hot all over with rushed passion. Mmmmm....

I may have to go away for a long, long time darling boy.

What shall I give you to remember me by? How can I make time slip without the sorrow of nervous pitter patter? I will write you love poems and fold them up so small like a stamp, post them into the gutter of galvanized desire just so the rats can humiliate me over and over again. They all stand up on their back feet and laugh at my love poetry.

At least you won't have to.

The raindrops drip onto my nose and coagulate with wet sadness.

The curtain is drawn, it is time to depend on **someone else**. I am sorry I could not carry your children.

There is so much I have not managed to tell you yet.

(I'm going to join a rock and roll band at lunchtime.)

Someone is curled up beside me on the wicker chair telling me secrets. They are a cashew or a dog... I'm not sure.

I'm not even a poet.

I don't know Joni Mitchel. Or the inland revenue man. I am a fool, you see. With ginger in my pocket. The taxman is after me; that is true. But he won't accept poems as he would pennies. I never even wrote him that letter. I lied. I can't do timetables and I am not intelligent enough to redefine desire. A famous columnist is certainly **not who I am.**

Also

Steely dan is here to stay?

The circus didn't want me to join. I begged and begged. They sent **me** away. I am empty, slinking away into the soiled night.

I am the

madman.

ABOUT THE WRITER:

Blossom Hibbert, Nottingham UK, spends most of her evenings reading and writing in pubs around the city, or drinking too much coffee. Writing weird prose about anything that catches her eye, focusing more on the poetry and short fiction than anything longer. She spends her weekends exploring the British countryside and sitting by riverbanks, trying to find inspiration in the monotony of it all!

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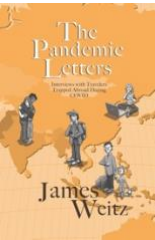
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