

## Annotated Bibliography — Spring 2017

Alexievich, Svetlana. "Voices from Chernobyl."

This article constitutes a compilation of perspectives of people affected by the Chernobyl disaster. The perspectives question authority taking priority over morality in the case of emergency. Alexievich criticizes the authorities' handling of the disaster without regard to human life, quoting from one survivor that the dead bodies are buried "in sealed zinc caskets, under cement tiles. And you need to sign this document here" (5), suggesting the insensitivity of the state towards the individual— every person is just another worker to live for the country and then be cast away. This shares the perspective of Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*, in which the pursuit of love is more important than military life, the former proving fruitful and happy and the latter traumatic and traitorous.

Berger, Jonathan. "How Music Hijacks Our Perception of Time."

"How Music Hijacks Our Perception of Time" is an article explaining the effects that music has on its listener's grasp of time, providing and examining several audio sources as evidence. Berger claims that music exists as its own separate entity, unconcerned with time: music can remove someone from a chronological flow, isolating them into a private, timeless space. He explains that while time is commonly thought of "as discretized units," music is "a separate, quasi-independent concept of time" — an alternate reality. In Chiver's essay "The Fighter," Siatta experiences distortion of both time and rational thought, demonstrating that trauma can also push people out of ordinary time — however, his alternate reality is more of a horror story rather than a personal privacy.

Chivers, C.J.. "The Fighter."

"The Fighter" is the tale of the transformation of a normal man into a hyper-vigilant schizophrenic due to the trauma of war. The article explores the unavoidable contrast between moral uprightness and uprightness of behavior. While Siatta believes "the Constitution isn't a bunch of toilet paper" — a patriotic, popular belief — and never expressed intent of hurting the innocent prior to his crime, he is still capable of sniping an unconfirmed enemy and almost killing an innocent group of friends. This discord between reality and ideology helps to explain why Goldsmith's essay, "On National Prejudices," is impractical: while he calls for international understanding (albeit still with nationalism), the tendency of people to fight contrary to grandiose plans for peace causes an unending flow of international conflict.

Depp, Michael. "On Essays: Literature's Most Misunderstood Form."

Depp's essay "On Essays: Literature's Most Misunderstood Form" explores the defining characteristics of an essay as opposed to other literary forms. Depp defines the essay as an amorphous form with a personal lens to a developing argument. His assertion that "a real essay ... never begins with its end" (1) and that the "essay's very nature [is] to deny us such certainty" (3) suggest that movement towards a conclusion — even if uncertain— is more important than the conclusion itself. Although Jones argues in "Unspeakable Things" that language is limited, Depp views the essay as reaching limit of language with the rhetorical strategies of a personal lens and a constant *development* to develop an argument to the best extent that language can.

Didion, Joan. "On Keeping a Notebook."

"On Keeping a Notebook" is Didion's rationale for her journal-writing enterprises. She explains that writing in a notebook prevents her from "los[ing] touch with a couple of people [she] used to be" (5), allowing her to stay linked to and to learn from the past. This yields a main idea of transcription as a physical repository for thought: the connotations and lessons learned from an event remain with its written account, emphasizing the power of logging. Journal-writing is a microcosm of what Schell does in "No More Unto the Breach," in which he uses history (the "journal" of civilizations) to substantiate his claim about international relations. Schell even challenges the age-old war system with history, demonstrating that any idea can be challenged with enough "notes."

Eighner, Lars. "On Dumpster Diving."

"On Dumpster Diving" is an essay encompassing both tips on Dumpster diving and implications drawn from Eighner's experiences. A common theme throughout the essay is that expertise can be developed in any field, even Dumpster diving. He notes that a fundamental principle of eating from Dumpsters is "using the senses and common sense" (2) — mastering these allows "the diver ... [to have] the last laugh" (7) over society. This relates to Shopenhauer's views of multiple perceptions — it is more likely for people of a profession to see their profession as it truly is ("D-perception"), rather than the clouded views of people in other fields; i.e., Dumpster divers can see the practical, gainful side of scavenging that ordinary consumers overlook.

Goldsmith, Oliver. "On National Prejudices."

In his essay, "On National Prejudices," Goldsmith calls for people to rise above their typical nationalistic conflicts and proudly come together. The article argues that occasionally conceding to others doesn't come at the expense of personal dignity; rather, this concession promotes coexistence and progress. He asserts that the opinion that "[the defense of national prejudice] cannot be destroyed without hurting [the necessary growth of love to our country] ... is a gross fallacy and delusion" (3) — that it is possible to mutually love oneself as much as others. Goldsmith's solution is designed to end conflicts such as that between Willy and Biff in *Death of a Salesman*, in which they were unable to accept each other without being reminded of the conflict and their own faults.

Hemingway, Ernest. *A Farewell to Arms*.

*A Farewell to Arms* is a romantic war novel staged during WWII. A major theme is the the futility of an individual's actions caused by entropy in the world. After participating long in the war, Lieutenant Henry learns from the deaths of his loved ones that "that was what you did. You died ... Stay around and they would kill you" (327): casualty in wartime is inevitable no matter what one did to survive. This relates to "On Being a Cripple" because both Lt. Henry and Mairs have physical, unpreventable burdens; however, both characters demonstrate that a positive and easygoing personality can makes the best of even the most unfortunate situations, with Lt. Henry finding love and Mairs learning empathy.

Hornby, Nick. "First Look At the Purse- the J. Geils, Band."

This essay explores Hornby's connotations of the song *First Look At the Purse* by the J. Geils Band with American ideals. A major theme is that a person's connotations of an object are often based more on hope than on reality. He claims that "[*First Look At the Purse*] ... was The Sound of Young America - loud, baffling, exotic, cool, wild" (7), a far cry from the "comfortable, middle-class Connecticut suburbs" (5) that Hornby knew from his life, the dream of a wild and free land rather than the monotonous doldrums that he actually knows. This is similar to "Nostalgia on Repeat," in which the mind injects a false nostalgia when investing time in an activity in the present; in both cases a prejudiced preconception is created.

Hornby, Nick. "Thunder Road- Bruce Springsteen."

This article describes the personal connection between Hornby and the song *Thunder Road*. His analysis of Springsteen's song suggests that the whole is not the sum of its parts, especially that literature is not defined by its constituents. While *Thunder Road* is "po-faced, [with] doomed romanticism" (3) and somewhat "bombastic and histrionic" (4), Hornby argues that it has a better sense of "soul" and understanding. This artful *soul* is similar to the techniques mentioned in "On the Necessity of Turning Oneself Into a Character," in which putting more of the author's "self-curiosity" into writing actually makes a less narcissistic piece. Both of these techniques suggest that is impractical to try to intuit the overall effect of a small internal factor because of the subjectivity of writing.

Jones, Silvia. "Unspeakable Things."

"Unspeakable Things" considers the limits of language by examining several forms of ineffable ideas. It concludes that language, while sufficient for communication, is by no means sufficient for all types of knowledge. "Phenomenal knowledge and indexical knowledge" (4), or the knowledge of sensory details and the ability to link objects to knowledge, are two such forms of knowledge that can be approximated by circumlocutory methods but never directly — it's impossible to explicitly state how a color is perceived, for example, without referencing an object associated with that color. "How to Tell a True War Story" affirms the inadequacy of language: O'Brien asserts that not even stories are limited by their gut sense of honesty and grounding, and phony-sounding stories cannot be conveyed effectively by language.

Kerns, Tom. "Arthur Schopenhauer's: The World as Will and Representations, Lecture V: Aesthetic Contemplation."

Kerns examines the work of Maslow and Schopenhauer about different forms of perception. A main idea of this text is that having a will (viz., a conscience that constantly interprets the world through the senses and twists perception of the world) is the cause of source of "the life problem (suffering and illusion)" (3). Kerns quotes Schopenhauer that in times of aesthetic contemplation "we forget our individuality, our will, and continue to exist only as pure subject, as clear mirror of the object" (Schopenhauer 178), and this loss of the viewer's observing presence and judgement improves accuracy. "Aesthetic contemplation" is observed in Hornby's analysis of the song, *First Look at the Purse*, where he is able to see beyond the surface-level loudness of the song to consider the song's deepest meaning of American identity.

Klosterman, Chuck. "Nostalgia on Repeat."

The article, “Nostalgia on Repeat,” is an exploration of the source of the seemingly-inexplicable phenomenon of feeling a false nostalgia (a sort of déjà vu) from stimuli that one has never experienced. It emphasizes the falsity of perception — what is often perceived as nostalgia is simply caused by the investment of time that is associated with time. Klosterman claims that “false nostalgia by having the same experiences over and over” (4) is a possibility because of people’s connection of hard work with positive memories — in essence, positive memories can be invoked with any hard work, whether it be in the past or the present.

Lopate, Phillip. “On the Necessity of Turning Oneself into a Character.”

The essay, “On the Necessity of Turning Oneself into a Character,” is an essay providing literary recommendations about the nature of the personal essay, especially regarding self-amusement of the author. An interesting major claim by Lopate is that participating in “self-curiosity” (72) is the best attitude of an author to write an essay. This, he claims, allows the author to “transcend the ego” (73), a necessary step to gain a “potential release from narcissism” (73), which in turn means that the essay can be more unbiased. The account of the newlyweds from “Voices from Chernobyl,” however, views compassion and a “release from narcissism” from a deeply emotional tragedy rather than introspection, suggesting that situational crises as well as internal reflection can deal with selfish issues.

Mairs, Nancy. “On Being a Cripple.”

“On Being a Cripple” is the rumination of Nancy Mairs about her situation of being a “cripple” with muscular sclerosis, and the challenges and lessons learned from the condition. Throughout the article, the unacceptance of truths as a method of coping method is emphasized. Her statement that “I am not a disease” (5) and that “I’m not sorry to be a cripple” (7) show her utmost determination to overcome her disease by creating her own truth of hope and health. This is opposite of the attitudes of the hostages in *Bel Canto*, in which their acceptance of their position gave them the patience necessary to wait for their freedom, rather than a determined hope to influence their own condition as Mairs had done.

Miller, Arthur. *Death of a Salesman*.

*Death of a Salesman* is a play about a family that goes into disarray because of conflicting values and misjudged personal potentials. A major theme is the importance of moving on from the past to aid recovery in the present. When Biff says, “It’s between me and [Willy]—that’s all I have to say” (58), unwilling to disclose the information of Willy’s affair to Linda, he shows his grudge against Willy sees no end, which eventually leads to Willy’s suicide. In an age with more headphones, as suggested in Thompson’s “How Headphones Changed the World,” problems such as the grudge between Willy and Biff are more numerous because people are more socially isolated with headphones and less likely to work out problems, instead allowing angry emotions to simmer and grow.

O’Brien, Tim. “How to Tell a True War Story.”

“How to Tell a True War Story” is an essay bringing to life the horror of the Vietnam War through the use of “true war stories.” O’Brien’s central claim is that writing is not “true” unless it *feels* real and honest. He argues that “happeningness is irrelevant” (9), and it’s possible to have “a

true story that never happened” (9) — what matters is the “grounding reality” (9) that gives a gut-instinct down-to-earth reaction rather than a historical correctness. The reliance on gut instinct in “How to Tell a True War Story” is very similar to the sentiment in Hornby’s analysis of *Thunder Road* by Bruce Springsteen — while Hornby believes that the best songs are the most genuinely resonant with someone, O’Brien believes the best stories are the most genuinely honest-sounding.

Patchett, Ann. *Bel Canto*.

Patchett’s novel *Bel Canto* is a drama about the shifting relations between the terrorists and their initially-terrified hostages. One of the factors gradually revealed is the childish innocence of the captors and the maturity of the captives, specifically emphasizing the innocence of children no matter how “tough” they appear. When Beatriz asks “I can shoot you?” (190) to Ruben as she holds the gun, she simply imitates adult actions without the mindset to carry through. Supporting this thought, Cory from *Fences* fully shows the intention of carrying through with the youthful action of playing sports, while his father Troy tries to stop him from doing so. These two texts demonstrate that children are pressured to rapidly move away from childish passions into an established role in society — to grow up perhaps too quickly.

Schell, Jonathan. “No More Unto the Breach.”

Schell’s essay “No More Unto the Breach” discusses the contradictions between the “war system” of old versus the reformist “Wilsonian system.” The idea of the war and negotiated-peace systems, he claims, have strengths where the other is weak to form a larger interdependent system. Schell claims that because the “war system and the Wilsonian plan [which are] antithetical at every point” (38) — the weaknesses of the Wilsonian system make a return to war inevitable. An analogy is of music versus time from “How Music Hijacks our Perception of Time”: Berger claims that music runs parallel to time, both existing on a temporal spectrum that only exist as one state at once; likewise, the war and peace systems exist on a political spectrum, but both exist simultaneously because they are interdependent.

Thompson, Derek. “How Headphones Changed the World.”

“How Headphones Changed the World” explains the development of the connotations of headphones in society. A major theme in Thompson’s writing is that visual connotations have an important place in the busy, modern landscape of today. He claims that “two plastic pieces connected by a wire create an aura of privacy” (3), suggesting headphones’ influence on controlling (by limiting) social interactions. Similar to Joan Didion’s piece “On Keeping a Notebook,” Thompson emphasizes the psychological connotations of a physical object: Didion views her notebook as a symbol of a timeless connection with “past selves,” while Thompson views headphones as a symbol of unsociability and quiet, even if music isn’t playing. These examples of physical memorabilia in a modernizing world are increasingly important when considering the rise of a productivity-based and social-interaction-lacking society.

Wilson, August. *Fences*.

*Fences* is a play about the discordant relationships Troy has with the people around him. Wilson emphasizes that the people with a high reputation are the ones who are most likely to sin, while

those with little dignity are the hardworking pillars of society. When explaining to his wife that he had an affair, Troy explains that “you [are] born with two strikes on you before you come to the plate” (69), indicating that even a single mistake in the wake of a “decent ... clean ... hard ... useful life” (69) ruins him. This dignity of the undignified is a theme shared in Eighner’s essay “On Dumpster Diving,” which implies that scavengers, while seemingly lowly to the non-dumpster divers, are actually often high-minded individuals who practically repurpose unwanted materials.