

Intertext

Volume 22
Issue 1 2014

Article 25

2014

Online Articles

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Recommended Citation

D'Elia, Doug; Saucedo, Luis; and Ross, Shawn L. (2014) "Online Articles," *Intertext*: Vol. 22 : Iss. 1 , Article 25.

Available at: <https://surface.syr.edu/intertext/vol22/iss1/25>

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Living the Disney Dream Doug D'Elia

The mummy arrived while I was sleeping.

The grunt got too close to the vapor line,
and now he looks like a mummy.
His toast colored flesh wrapped in
patches of blood-soaked gauze.

I won't get to know this soldier;
his injuries are too severe.
The medics who brought him in
said he doesn't have a face.

He came in a dog tag casualty.
and he'll be leaving soon,
on a four-hour flight to
a surgical hospital in Japan.

The newest corpsman is
changing the mummy's dressings,
praying he doesn't lose it
before he proves to everyone and
himself that he can do it.

I feel shame and disgust that I can't look away,
that I need to stare. Making matters worse,
there is little privacy in this ward,
and all the curiosity seekers and peepers
are positioning themselves to be relevant
at something other than gawking.

The mummy's eyes dart from person to person,
using our eyes as forbidden mirrors,
watching our fearful expressions
that serve to gauge what life will be like
in this, his new, frightening, repulsive body.

One of the medics said he knows the guy, and
all he ever talks about is how beautiful
his girlfriend is, and how he loves his
job at Disney World and how he once shook
the hand of Walt Disney himself,
the ex-ambulance driver
who makes dreams come true.

The mummy doesn't know it yet,
but he will survive his injuries, his pursuit
of normalcy will pass through the offices of
reconstructive surgeons, physical therapists,
psychological counselors and pharmacists.

One night in between wakefulness and a nightmare
he will hold to the idea that The Dream Maker
himself will rescue him.

He will write to Mr. Disney
and ask him to consider employing
wounded veterans at the Magic Kingdom,
working the Disney's Character Breakfast,
disguising their disfigured bodies in animal costumes,
patting kids on the head and signing autographs,
before disappearing hastily through the exclusive
"Cast Members" door where nobody, especially
children, are allowed to see reality.

Could there be a more perfect job for this soldier?

He'll even petition Walt to let him
wear the Goofy costume home after his shift?
Maybe he'll wear it all day long, waving
to kids from his car.
Maybe he'll wear it to bed,
like some men wear bad wigs
that cover-up what they don't like
in themselves?

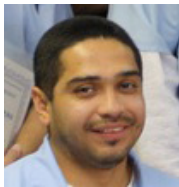
At night his beautiful wife will spoon him,
wrapping her arms around his big cuddly,
furry body, trying to convince herself that
she too is living the Disney dream?

Doug D'Elia is a member of the Syracuse Veterans' Writing Group. His poem "Heavy Metal" can be found [here](#).

Numb Listening

Luis Saucedo

Back in the Summer of '96 when the temperature was in the mid 90s and a year after a lot people died from heat stroke. Those days were so hot that even the sweat was sweating. It was no different on an August day when I walked into the courtroom of 307 and the A.C. gave no justification for its hot air. It should have been an indication that it would be a day of no mercy. As I stood in the same spot like others, in that beige courtroom with its oak bench, I was looking out a window to my left, which showed a sunny day with no shine. My lawyer was dressed in blue trying to palliate to the black robe, waiting to hear what the judge was going to say to bring some relief to my future. When he said 50 years, that was all I heard even though he kept on talking. I was lost in the present like I was in a trance. I tried to hear what he was saying, but my ears betrayed me and I couldn't focus on what he was saying. This was when I became so numb from the shock that I couldn't react or move; and another numbness overcame my body: it was so cold that I dropped at least 10 degrees of body temperature, and my hands became clammy. Yet somehow I was sweating. Although I was sentenced to more hot days, I was cold. The story of my life.



Luis Saucedo is a student with the Education Justice Project, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. "Numb Listening" was written for WRT 400, a collaboration between Syracuse University students and incarcerated students with the Education Justice Project. In describing the piece, Luis write, "He invokes the sensory embodiment of his courtroom experience in order to give his readers access to his emotional state."

Untitled

Shawn Llewellyn Ross

Entering Cook County Jail was an utterly memorable experience. The smell was utterly putrid, the lighting dim, the overall vibe morose. I was not accustomed to the menagerie of life I was now encountering, and my response was measured and uncertain.

I had been in the drunk tank before, but I'd never gone to lock proper, facing a felony that would forever alter the course of my life. Circumstances that were unforeseen at that moment would make themselves clear as I moved through the course of my litigation and subsequent incarceration. Nine months previous to my intake in Cook County, I was in an automobile accident in which four people were killed. I had driven drunk hundreds of times before and never once been in an accident. I believe it was this lack of catastrophe that ultimately led to the ambivalence I had towards impaired/drunken driving and the subsequent accident I was convicted for.

Upon entrance in Cook County Jail, I was separated into a "tank" with about one hundred other individuals who were being sectioned off to go to Division 11, then considered the "Super Max" division. Having no gang affiliations, I felt utterly alone as people in the "tank" self-segregated according to their gang membership. We were fingerprinted, our pictures were taken, and we were strip searched to check for tattoos and STDs. Never in my life had I felt so violated and afraid, but as I looked around, I noticed an abject lack of terror in anyone other than myself. A bored complacency was apparent in most of the faces.

Once we entered the deck and were assigned a cell, I found a corner to quietly duck into and try to make myself as inconspicuous as possible. I contemplated the accident and the events of the day, basically all the events that led to this moment and the position I was in. I had cousins who had been imprisoned before, and I had family who were Chicago cops. Suffice to say, I had a variety of influences to choose from in my life. I thought about the choices I'd made. I thought about what I'd done, and who I had become.

Within days the initial shock of incarceration wore off and I worked myself into the routine. But a thought nagged at me day and night, what would life become after this experience was over? What I did not contemplate or foresee was the person I'd become through this time.

Before I became incarcerated I was a student at the University of Missouri working on a communications degree. I never thought about an incarcerated person's experience because I never in a million years thought I would share that fate. I considered myself a "moderate" liberal concerned with a variety of social issues, but one issue that never entered my consciousness was the rights that formerly incarcerated people lose upon their release from prison. I am a firm believer in the axiom of getting the results you deserve, and to that end, I do feel that incarcerated persons get locked up because of their actions. However, we are a nation that prides itself on second chances, yet those chances are few and far between for someone coming out of prison. If upon release I'm required to pay taxes, and the time I've served is seen as a type of restitution, and if I conduct myself in a law-abiding fashion upon release, then why should I lose

the right to vote? Why should I lose access to public housing and funding to improve myself through federal grants and loans? If not convicted of a violent crime, and showing no previous inclination towards violence, why should I as an American citizen lose my Second Amendment right to protect my property and person with a firearm? These are questions I never considered prior to my incarceration which plague my now.

The system claims to rehabilitate, but in many cases offers no way for prisoners to improve their situation or expand their consciousness. Programs that offer college accredited courses to incarcerated persons are outside the norm throughout the country. This is astounding to me because as Michelle Alexander makes clear in *The New Jim Crow*, incarcerated individuals who take college/vocational courses while incarcerated are 80% less likely to reoffend. These are people who return to their communities with a renewed sense of purpose, generally looking to amend previous wrongs. Not providing prisoners with this opportunity sets them up for failure. Having learned no viable skills or trade while incarcerated, they return to a life of crime, which leads to further incarceration. Unions and private prisons lobby the federal government to reduce schooling for incarcerated persons in an attempt to make life-long wards of incarcerated persons. Awareness of this cycle is tricky. Prison advocates seem to be few, and they're definitely not as vociferous as the "tough on crime" crowd. I take it as a personal mission to advocate for my fellow incarcerated brothers upon release. The reader may chuckle at that last line, but to a certain degree it is true. On an average deck you have a hundred guys. Guys you see on a daily basis. You dine together, work out together, go to school together, and bond over the course of weeks, months and in some cases years. Prison is almost like war, because it forces you to establish solidarity with others that are privy to the same experience.

I'm now thirty months out from returning to society. I will not lie, I'm scared shitless. When I was last free, Facebook had just been invented and gas was well under three dollars. My support system has eroded over the years. My mother, who was always my biggest advocate, passed in the fall of 2011. I have other family members I can rely on, but it isn't the same. I'm in a position that many of my peers are in: we've served our time without much to go home to. Hell, college graduates are having trouble finding employment and I'll still be thirty credits shy of graduation upon my release. I don't feel sorry for myself. I deserved punishment for my action, to an extent we all do. But when it is all said and done and time is served, all I want is the ability to put this in my rearview and continue with my life. It is increasingly apparent that the rules are designed to make this as hard as can be.



Shawn Llewellyn Ross is a student with the Education Justice Project, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. This untitled piece was written for WRT 400, a collaboration between Syracuse University students and incarcerated students with the Education Justice Project. Ross explains that this piece describes how he "came to intimately understand the Industrial Prison Complex."