

WE WRITE DYSTOPIAS



LYDIA

ERICKSON

on the cover: photograph of a figure of a king, oak with paint and gilding, from flanders, ca. 1300-1325. in the collection of the cloisters (52.82). "he may represent the youngest of the three magi."

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ON EARTH AS IT IS IN

give us our daily bread, and
(forgive this atheist
for supplicating the universe
in the words she was as a child taught;
empiricists have so little poetry
in their communions.)

i find myself as tongue-tied as the mooses
who refused to answer god,
my head and heart
are lost like languages in the tower of babel,
for certainly we cannot, do not
understand each other. god's practical joke?
the true mistake of humanity, i think
was not finishing the apple.

reassuring, to remember
that the world has always been ending
don't the mayans, and jesus, and the scientists
all say so?
a second flood awaits us,
and perhaps a dove will bring
an olive branch
for this appalled and appalling
world.

though you
wrap your heart in bandages
leave clear your eyes
only the righteous dead deserve blindness;
they have done their time among us,
and suffered in ways we will never have to
again, perhaps.

in the next world, we will all be
artists, scientists, explorers;
in this one, we must be builders.
bridges,
not staircases or towers
will lead us to our god.

STAGES OF GRIEF

denial is for midnight,
you hoped to wake and find
a day that had not left behind
your half of the country,
your whole head and heart.
(hard to imagine sunrise healing
this nation split apart)

in the early ams, anger beckons
you'd never reckoned
on such foolishness and fear
in this cheering, jeering nation,
(in this sad nation, split apart.)

by morning light we bargain—
perhaps the house, or senate races—
could he *really* build a wall?
(the wall is built already
across this great nation, split apart)

depression. the sun rises, and
the world is not the same, or sane? and we—
we are to blame.
(we did not work hard enough,
for our nation, split apart.)

acceptance—after coffee. or after
another night and day.
not of where or who we are,
but of the the long, *long* way.

there's very far to go,
but where we walk together,
perhaps together there we'll stay.

THE MIDWIFE APATHY

knowledge does not damn us,
but only the knowing sin.
for while ignorance begets evil,
apathy lets it win.
she is midwife to the mother,
nursemaid to the child,
she who knows good from evil,
yet does not conscience reconcile.

DAMAGE REPORT

Meant to write Presidential but it came out Pestilential. Dang.

Margaret Atwood

The world disintegrating
Seems to contain only
Perishable pleasures

And sure, we have each other
The final bulwark against
The rising of the hydra's heads

The beast slouching
—A more belated birth, perhaps,
Than expected—

But every usual escape
From daily cares
Has taken on a monstrous form

The shadows of stories
My sustenance in such times
Wax in warning of the nearing night

And heroes hang their heads
Escaping others' nooses
And I I I

Am drowning in Necessity
Watch: two heads bloom
For each one severed

One thing that can be said
For the fight against injustice:
No matter how bad the market,

There's always work to do.

AND THE KING WILL ANSWER THEM

Do you think they know?
These politicians, these security officers,
these men who rip off women's veils.
Do you think they know
they are not Christians?

But surely I should not
speak of such things;
I am an atheist,
lover of witches, devils, and bastard gods—
chaos, surprises,
things out of season.
I could not revoke your religion
any more than you could revoke
my humanity.

But even Christ
had the good sense to disdain hypocrisy;
and I am not so generous a soul.
Listen, then.
Know yourself.

You who claim to walk in The Wiseman's footsteps
only to block another's path,
see what I see—
you who think yourself persecuted disciple,
are in fact a pharisee.

You are not the good Samaritan
but the priest who passed by,
not camel with breaking back
but one whom God will not let
enter needle's eye.

And surely at heaven's gate
St. Peter will repeat words you spoke:
your papers are no good.
Your visa's been revoked.
Perhaps Christ himself will come,
look at you and look through
and turn to your St. Peter,
mouthing the word "who?"

(How could he know you?
You do not know yourself.)
But I am only an atheist.
I should not try to speak for Christ—
and neither, I think, should you.

Listen, instead—
Perhaps you will
know Him.

HOPE

We write dystopias
imagine ourselves
dark visionaries
We who warn
who see
in the seed
rot or
unfurling leaves

There is no such thing, of course
as a dark visionary
There is little power in
predicting gravity—more
in making the wind
on which feathers rise

We may hold a mirror to mankind
but any portrait, even the photograph
requires omission and thus admission
of light in dark, of
temporality
of the possibility
that the best really is
yet to come



Lydia Erickson is a writer of poetry, fiction, and non-fiction. She studied English and Spanish at Boston University. Originally from Palo Alto, California, she'll be teaching English in Hiroshima prefecture, Japan, starting in the autumn of 2017. She blogs at lydiaerickson.com, and tweets as [@lilyanquill](https://twitter.com/lilyanquill). Photo credit: Shivani Patel.



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