

dispatch



1 SEPTEMBER 2009
ISSN 1948-1217



Adam Moorad

dispatch litareview
ISSN #1948-1217

litareview.com
dispatch@litareview.com
subscribe@litareview.com

"Oikos"
©2009 Adam Moorad

permanently archived:
litareview.com/09/1sepamoorad.shtml



—Christy Call

OIKOS

Ready to explode, roadside bombs line the highway. The radio says so to Lamb. He touches the volume and thinks about roadside bombs. Feels distantly alarmed and has the urge to explode. He wishes he had a more volcanic personality. He is driving home from work. There is traffic. Lines on the highway. He observes the world in a blur. A cow. A steeple. Every other mile. Another cow. Another steeple. In the sky, an airplane. The radio says something about airplanes. Airplanes have crashed. Will crash. Are crashing. Lamb looks back at the road. An exit ramp. A flag. Telephone wire. Another cow. He wishes buffalo still dominated North America. He thinks this would be good for North America. For the environment, for everything. He closes his eyes. Keeps his foot on the gas pedal, hands on the wheel. Pistons grind under the hood. He wonders what the road looks like in front of him. Will he crash? Will he explode? Are there bombs along the road ahead? He feels paranoid and alone and attempts to envision someone he can recognize. He pictures his older brother, Michael. Michael is riding on the back of a buffalo. The buffalo looks cool and serene. Michael looks happy riding the buffalo. Lamb wants coolness and serenity. Like a buffalo. Opens his eyes: the highway, lines on the highway, an American flag, telephone wire, another cow, and no buffalo.

Lamb wonders why he works. He thinks about the word “career” and says it out loud twice. Feels a strange sense of happiness and sadness. Happy to not be at work. Sad to be coming from work. The voice on the radio says something indecipherable. Sunlight pours through the

windshield and touches his skin. He looks at his arms. They are too white. Lamb feels malnourished and unattractive from a life spent indoors. Working. He doesn't have enough time to be outdoors. This is counter-evolutionary. He's failing to evolve because of his job requirements. He considers buying a membership to a tanning salon. Imagines the smell of lotion and pictures himself in a Speedo on a tanning bed. He doesn't understand why. He looks at his arms. Sees freckles. Hairs. A fading birthmark. Feels confused. Imagines purple ultraviolet bulbs baking his skin. Baking the organs beneath his skin. He thinks about the damage caused by ultraviolet radiation. About developing skin cancer on his arms. He wonders if his arms would have to be amputated. Wonders if society would shun him if he were to ever find himself armless. Lamb pulls onto an exit ramp. He looks around. The sky, an airplane, another cow, another steeple. Another.

Lamb remembers riding to church on his father's wedding day. His older brother drove. Lamb tries to remember how much older. He can't. He remembers his father telling him that it was a special day for their family. Lamb said he was glad for his father. Michael was silent. His father said something about their mother looking down from heaven. The memory metastasizes in Lamb's brain.

“How do you know?” Lamb asked his father.

“I know,” his father said. “She would want me to be happy.”

Lamb had asked his father the question weeks before, in their garage. His father said, “Do you ever think about how you will feel when you’re my age?” Lamb felt a strange sensation. He cleared his throat. Pretended to cough. He never felt comfortable alone with his father. He shrugged his shoulders. Said he did. Lamb’s father turned around. Moved a paint can from one shelf to another. Stared at the shelf. Closed his eyes. “Well. People feel tired sometimes,” he said. Lamb’s father turned around. Looked at Lamb. Lamb did not move. His father yawned, looked at the Webber grill in the corner of the garage. Yawned again. Looked at a chainsaw hanging beside a dormant refrigerator. Smiled half-heartedly. His father thought everything made sense.

At the Easter wedding, Lamb’s outfit matched his brother’s. A black tuxedo. Yellow bow-tie. Yellow cummerbund. They always matched. Several years later, Lamb still had the tuxedo. He kept it in his closet with the rest of his dress clothes. When Lamb moved in with his girlfriend, Amy, he took the tuxedo to a secondhand store for twenty-five dollars. Spent it somewhere.

The new wife, Cynthia, was frail with a vague, waterlogged beauty. She taught Sunday School. After Lamb went to college, his father was alone. Cynthia would come over during the holidays. Bake pies. Apple. Pumpkin. Key lime. Every holiday. Another pie. One Christmas Eve, Cynthia drank too much eggnog and fell out of her chair at the dinner table. She laughed and didn’t seem embarrassed. Lamb thought she looked at home on a floor, laughing. Lamb knelt down to help her up. “Did your mother like to drink eggnog?” Cynthia asked. “I don’t know,” Lamb said. Michael looked on,

not speaking. He never said anything. Lamb's father folded his arms. Looked around. Looked tired.

Lamb never knew his mother. She died before he was born—technically—at thirty-one, at the Baptist hospital downtown. Induced childbirth. There was a car accident. Lamb arrived ahead of schedule. His whole life is lived ahead of schedule. He wishes he had memories of his mother's life. Sometimes he closes his eyes and pictures what it was like in the womb, inside her. Tangled in umbilical miasma. A zygote. Blind. Eating what she ate. Feeling what she felt. Sleeping. Dreaming.

Lamb pulls into the parking lot of his apartment building, turns off the ignition. The pistons stop. For fifteen minutes he sits behind the wheel, not wanting to move. He looks at his building. Bricks. Balconies. Telephone wires. Home. He lives here with his girlfriend and Donny, their roommate. Lamb thinks about the word “home.” He says it out loud, looks at his arms, feels weak. Rubs his hands together furiously. The friction in his fingertips makes him nauseous. “Home,” he repeats. He wishes he were happier. Wonders what happy people do to feel happy. He thinks: his mother looking down from heaven, Michael riding a buffalo, ultraviolet radiation, burning, a grazing cow, a steeple, pointing, a waving flag, asking his father the questions, his father disappearing, exhaustion, the roadside, the bombs, a bow-tie and a speedo, a dreaming zygote.

Inside the apartment, Donny is unemployed, playing video games in his boxer shorts. He has no career. Lamb envisions his own career. Donny nods in his glasses. Lamb nods back, moves through the apartment, steps out on the balcony. Looks at Amy’s dying plants. The dried leaves look tired. He feels tired. He walks into his bedroom to change. Sees himself in the mirror. He stares. Feels skinny. Tells himself he will do a better job of feeding himself. He will become stronger, happier, better nourished, and more attractive.

“Your father called,” Donny says. “He wants you to go to dinner with him sometime this week.”

“That’s all he said?” Lamb says. He imagines his father thinking about him. Calling him. Wanting to see him. Asking Donny to take a message for him. Lamb’s

father was a preacher once. His father was a revered man in the community. Lamb pictures his father sitting across a dinner table from him, arms folded, condemnatory, and Lamb not wanting to be alone with his father or with anyone.

“I think,” Donny says. “He sounded sad. I felt sorry for him.”

“Do you want to come with?” Lamb says. “When I go?”

Donny looks at the television. His face. Red. Sweaty. He throws the video game controller against a couch cushion. He says, “Goddammit.” He leans backward. Folds his hands behind his head. Looks at the television. At the controller. Shakes his head. “I don’t know,” he says. “I don’t really have the money for eating out right now.”

“You don’t need any,” Lamb says. “My dad will pay for both of us.”

Lamb looks at Donny. Sits. Looks at the television. An alien dances across the screen. Its arms and jaws dangle in a computerized wind. Its mouth and claws are laced with the blood of something. Everything moves in slow motion.

“I’m intimidated by church people,” Donny says. “They make me nervous.” He snatches the video game controller from the cushion. Restarts the game. Lamb watches. Laughs.

“You’re always nervous,” Lamb says. “Besides, he

isn't a preacher anymore."

"You're always nervous," Donny says. His eyes are glued to the television. With a sword he engages an alien from another dimension on a yellow brick road. Tries to save a princess from a burning battleship in a far-off galaxy. From a car accident. From ultraviolet radiation. From cancer. From armlessness.

Lamb looks around the apartment. He doesn't know what to do. He cannot get comfortable. He looks at Donny, then at the television. Donny walks up a road, bombs exploding in far away places. Lamb watches the explosions from the safety of the sofa. They combust on another side of the world. There are yellow flames. The sun is out. The sky is blue. Things are on fire. Lamb imagines he's on fire. Drowning in flames, death imminent. Amy's plants are already dead. His mother is patiently looking down from heaven. Lamb is an excited tiny zygote.

Something is about to happen.

Donny says, "Maybe next time."

"Suit yourself," Lamb says.

"I need to get a job," Donny says.

"Where's Amy?" Lamb says.

"I don't know," Donny says

"What are we supposed to do for dinner?" Lamb says. "Tonight?"

“I don’t know,” Donny says. “I don’t have any money.”

“You don’t need money,” Lamb says.

“I don’t know,” Donny says. “Are you going to call your dad?”

“Maybe,” Lamb says.

“What’s the difference between a preacher and a pastor?” Donny wonders.

“I don’t know,” Lamb says. He leans backward, crosses his legs, tries to maneuver his spine in a posture-supporting position. Looks at his fingernails. Smells the apartment. The paint and drywall and stagnancy of bottled air. Air particles bouncing against one another throughout the room. Against the floor. The ceiling. The television. Wanting to be released. Static crackles across the screen. The particles brush against Lamb’s skin. “Let’s go to that Mexican place,” he says. He closes his eyes. His body is in his apartment, feeling torn and calm. Split like a piece of firewood. It is the seventeenth century. Lamb, bearded, chops firewood. Buffalo roam the continent freely. He lives in a frontier log cabin with ten children. His wife has scarlet fever. He is chopping wood in the snow. His children watch him, his beard, the wood, the axe. He chops and chops until his hands blister and burst. The cold burns his skin. The axe handle is a bone—an extension of Lamb’s own body. His body stays one place, his mind another.

“Mexican food sucks,” Donny says.

“Then we should get sushi,” Lamb says.

Amy opens the door and walks into the apartment. She drops her keys on the kitchen table. Her face is tired.

“Welcome home,” Donny says. “Sushi sucks more.”

Amy looks around. Confused. “What?”

“Your boyfriend wants to take me on a date,” Donny says. “Are you jealous?” He looks at the television screen. Frowns. Says, “Not again, goddammit.”

Amy looks at Lamb, annoyed. “I wouldn’t be if he ever took me anyplace.”

Lamb shrugs. He tries to kiss her in passing but she resists.

“Well you shouldn’t be,” Lamb says and pinches her arm. When he touches Amy’s body he thinks about his own and looks at his abdomen. His skeleton is rapidly decomposing. He is in a cold casket in some far away field. He shivers. He sees his flesh dehydrating and disintegrating. Worms crawl around the casket walls. They look at him and are revolted by his presence. Slowly, they edge away. They are sick and nauseous. Lamb is sick and nauseous.

“I don’t have a boyfriend,” Amy says. “I have a roommate I share a bed with who I feed and clean up after.” Lamb and Donny laugh. Lamb looks at Amy. She is smiling but her eyes flutter. Conveying neglect, looking ordinarily tired. She sets her purse on the couch and

stands between Donny and the television screen.

“What the hell?” Donny says. “Move it. I’m about to die.”

“Let’s go to a bar,” Amy says. She doesn’t move. “I had a hell of a day.”

“Big surprise,” Donny says. He presses pause on the paddle. Sets it on the floor between his legs, exhales, admits defeat. Amy laughs. Donny shrugs. His shoulders look heavy when he does this.

Lamb feels temporary sympathy. He walks over to the refrigerator. Opens it. Searches for alcohol. There is nothing. He opens the freezer and finds an old water bottle half-full of Jim Beam. He takes the bottle and puts it on the counter. Opens the refrigerator again. Rummages around for something to mix with whiskey. A carton of soy milk. A can of seltzer water. Nothing. Lamb realizes he has forgotten to drink anything alcoholic for several consecutive days. He feels healthy and decides to give up drinking. He will exercise every morning before work. He will eat more vegetables. He will floss more frequently. He will become a better person with a greater lung capacity. Lamb looks at the wall and imagines the cells inside his brain multiplying. Growing larger. He feels smarter. He stands with his eyes closed for five minutes. He places his hand on his heart. It is beating gradually. He wonders if his pulse is strong for someone his age. He counts the beats in his chest. Loses count.

There is shouting when Lamb opens his eyes. Donny is jumping in front of the television. Donny says, “Finally.

Thank you God.” Lamb stares at the sink. Blinks at a stack of dirty dishes.

Amy, puzzled, watches Donny from the kitchen, still jumping. She looks at Lamb standing in the kitchen looking at the dishes.

Lamb looks away. Sulks. Takes the bottle in his hand. Walks to the couch.

“You won?” Lamb says. He rubs his eyes and tries to focus. He stares at the bottle and wonders what to do. He smells the contents. His spine stiffens.

“Did we decide to go yet?” Amy says. She stands and walks over to the sink, picks up a plate, drops it. It thunders against the sink’s hollow basin. “Where are we going?” she says.

“I don’t know if I want to go,” Donny says, eyes glued to the television screen. An animated version of him twirls a sword as he climbs the stairs of a castle to the song of trumpeters. Cartoon flags blow. Confetti flies. At the top of the staircase, Donny embraces a princess. Donny looks at the television, happy. Almost proud. Lamb wishes he could always feel the way Donny looks right now.

“Come on,” Amy says. “It’s not like you have to wake up early tomorrow. You can bring a friend.”

“Donny doesn’t have any friends,” Lamb says. He takes a sip from the bottle and coughs a lot. He cannot stop coughing. “Besides, he doesn’t have any money.”

His eyes water when he hands the bottle to Donny. He hears voices. The television murmurs in muted breaths. Nothing makes sense to him. He tries to listen. Water running. Amy is washing dishes.

Donny looks at the bottle and the princess. Smiles. Takes the bottle. Offers Lamb the controller. Lamb doesn't move. "I always have money to drink," Donny says. He takes a sip and looks at the bottle. He takes another sip.

"So when are we going?" Lamb asks. He is beginning to feel less nauseous. Still nauseous. He stands up and walks over to Amy. There are only three dirty dishes left. Lamb says, "Do you want some help?" and kisses the back of her arm.

"Almost done," she says. "I don't care anymore."

She shuts the faucet off. Turns around. Dries her hands on Lamb's shirt. Lamb touches his stomach. He feels malnourished but fat. He says, "I need to lose weight."

"If you were any thinner you wouldn't exist," Amy says. She opens a makeup cache and applies something to her face. "Now where are we going?"

"Let's go wherever you want to go," Lamb says.

"Yeah," Donny says. "You decide." He sits in front of the television. Yellow boxer shorts. Glasses. The game restarts. He is back at the start of his mission. He must travel across hundreds of galaxies again. He must duel

aliens in hand to hand combat for interstellar domination again. He must fight for good against evil. He must save the princess again.

Lamb thinks about his yellow bow-tie and cummerbund. He wonders if the bow-tie and cummerbund were sold together or separate. He imagines they were sold individually. He pictures the two articles of dress clothing alone in different strangers' closets. Separate and tired. Miles and miles of highway apart. Bombs along the highway. Every other mile. Cows and steeples. Airplanes in the sky. Voices on the radio, murmurs in the television. Ultraviolet light.

He feels cool and serene, like Michael riding a buffalo in some pasture on the frontier. Lamb sits in front of a fan. He adjusts himself and leans backward. He feels nothing. He moves the fan. Nothing. Again and nothing again. Am I dying? Cancer on his arms. He will focus all his energy on better, healthful living. He will be persistent and disciplined and this will save him from an early death. From lost arms. From the inevitable.

Donny must save the princess from death. From aliens. From a galaxy. From cancer. From a galaxy of cancer.

Lamb feels the urge to fight cancer. He will cut his arms if he has to; to save his life. He can use an axe or his father's chainsaw. If Cynthia died of cancer, he wouldn't care. She'd drink eggnog and fall out of her chair. Michael wouldn't say anything because he never does. They'd laugh about it together at the dinner table. Brothers. Laughing, looking out the window at American flags in

people's yards. These people would go on to die in downtown Baptist hospitals. He touches his face and realizes he is smiling.

“Okay,” Donny says. “Let’s go if we’re going.”

“Where?” Lamb says.

“Around the block,” Donny says. He stands up. Walks to his closet. Climbs into a pair of pants on which he wipes his glasses.

“That place is awful,” Amy says. She slips on shoes, kicks them off, and tries on another pair.

“It’s okay,” Lamb says. “I’ve been there.”

Amy looks worried. Donny walks to the door. Opens it. Amy looks at Donny, then at Lamb.

“The sooner we leave, the sooner we get back,” Lamb says. She looks at him. She wears a bored expression. He doesn’t know what else to say.

Amy decides on a pair of shoes. Puts them on. Follows Donny out the door.

“I saw your plants today,” Donny says to Amy. “They look dead.”

“I will water them extra tomorrow,” Amy says. “They’ll come back to life.”

Lamb wonders how much water it takes to bring something back to life. Envisions the ocean’s size and depth. There are waves crashing into a shore. A breeze. Salt. He thinks about drowning. Is he drowning? Capsizing. Sinking. Lamb breathes. He is bringing himself back to life.

Donny looks at Lamb and says, “Don’t drink too much,” and laughs. Lamb laughs with Donny, not knowing why.

“Don’t worry,” Lamb says. He looks at Amy. “I have work tomorrow.”

Amy doesn’t say anything. She digs through her purse. Finds a tube of lipstick. Uncaps the tube. Puckers. Applies.

It is cool outside. The trees along the sidewalk are imposing. Large green branches reaching around in every direction. They are oak trees. Lamb's father cut down the oak in their front yard with a chainsaw. It was dying, he said. There were small, green twigs growing from the stump but the larger branches were barren. Lamb's father told him to go inside. Lamb obeyed. His father cut. Lamb watched from a dining-room window. Sawdust fell on the lawn. It looked like confetti.

Lamb closes his eyes. Pictures his father in the yard working. He thinks about doing work. About his career. He feels a strange sense of guilt. He has never done any real work in his life. He has never had a callous or a sore back from manual labor. He's spoiled and useless.

He once fantasized about a redeeming life of moral and praiseworthy value. He would like to meet the perfect woman—an Indian princess—and marry her. Move out to the country and buy a piece of property. A farm, log cabin. On the frontier. He would have goats, horses, cows, chickens. He would plant crops and work in the fields. He would grow his own food. The harvest would be the most exciting time of year. He would have many children who would work in the fields with him. He would teach them the value of a hard day's work. Teach them how to live redeeming lives. His children would teach these values to their children, his grandchildren, who would climb on his lap and ask him to tell stories about his life as a young man. They would want to hear about the adventures and experiences of their grandfather. Lamb would tell these children stories. This makes him happy. Proud of the life he has lived.

Lamb is shivering. Donny and Amy walk into the bar. He follows them in. Looks around. The bar is full of blue neon with many people talking, screaming, and laughing. Singing together. Enjoying themselves. The company of others. Lamb feels alive and suddenly wants to die. The bar is crowded and there is no place to sit. Everyone looks happy. What he should do to feel the way the people in the bar look? Lamb thinks he should have stayed in. He has work in the morning and doesn't want to feel hungover. He thinks he should quit his job and move to the country. He hopes Donny and Amy will only want one drink. Donny and Amy talk to one another and Lamb doesn't know what to say. He doesn't want to speak. Impassioned murmurs surround him. Lamb can't hear anything clearly. He hopes no one asks him any questions and thinks about calling his father. He wonders what he'd say. Loses his train of thought. Counts the seconds as they pass. Loses count. Feels awkward and antisocial. Tries to think of a way to participate. Donny, how is the job search going? Amy, I like your shoes. Hey guys, how do you feel about buying a Webber grill for the balcony?

People swarm around the bar. John Cougar Mellencamp sings, "Come on baby make it hurt so good." There is only one bartender on duty. His shirt has a palm tree on the chest. Its branches look tired. He ignores Donny hunched over the bar waving cash in the blue neon light. Donny says curse words to himself out loud. Amy looks around the barroom at other girls. Jealously. Touching her earrings. Looking at her shoes. There is no place to move. Lamb looks around. Sees a television. Candlelight. There are strange animal taxidermy hanging from the walls. A fish. A deer. A buffalo. He rubs his eyes. He keeps rubbing. Lamb tells Amy he will be right back.

He walks to the bathroom through a labyrinth of amorphous forms. At the sink, he furiously scrubs his hands. The bathroom is dark and messy. There are no paper towels or soap.

Lamb looks at himself in the mirror. His face is still where it should be. His eyes. His ears. In place. He looks at his hair. Feels greasy. Less nauseous. He can hear John Cougar Mellencamp singing, “You don’t have to be so exciting.” He moves his feet and realizes he is standing in a puddle of water. Disgusted, he stands still in it. He doesn’t want to move. He is a volcanic island, pushed through the earth’s crust by the geothermal energy. Again he looks at his reflection and wonders how to erupt. He longs to erupt. He will erupt. John Cougar Mellencamp says, “Sometimes love don’t feel like it should.” Lamb runs his fingers through his hair. He looks at the soap suds on the sink, popping, running down the drain. He presses his arms together. This body is decomposing. This skin is withering. He looks at his hands. His skin. He feels tired. He is dying. He will die in the Baptist hospital downtown. Someone knocks on the bathroom door. Lamb looks at himself and then away. He feels removed from everything he touches. Tired. Sick. His fingers are miles away. The door knob is in a different galaxy. The mirror is a different time zone. Lamb steps out of the puddle slowly. Splashes. Ripples glance off the soles of his shoes. He coughs. He coughs again. He spits. Sees a roadside in his reflection. A steeple. His building. Brick. Balconies. A chainsaw. An alcoholic water bottle from long ago. Dries his hands on his t-shirt. Opens the door. There is a fat man standing outside. He is wearing a cowboy hat. Sweating. Lamb gives him a half smile. The fat man has no face. Lamb passes. Disappears into the crowd of people. Lamb looks around. The bar is

dark. The air is opaque. His vision blurs. There is cigarette smoke. Blue neon light. He is alone. He will remain this way, suspended, dying, alone with everyone.




Adam Moorad's writing has recently appeared or is forthcoming in 3 A. M. Magazine, the Emprise Review, Storyglossia, and Underground Voices. He lives in Brooklyn and works in publishing.

@blogspot.com



—P. H. Madore

The background features large, stylized, lowercase letters 'd' and 'r' in a white, sans-serif font. The 'd' is on the left and the 'r' is on the right. Behind these letters is a circular graphic with horizontal stripes in shades of brown, tan, and black. The text is overlaid on the left side of the 'd' and 'r' characters.

dispatch is currently seeking a culture editor. applicants should be generally on top of current events, both mainstream and alternative, and should have at least three 210–250–word dispatches to submit for suggestion. all applications will be responded to but only one will be approved. dispatch@litareview.com

I am not a Marxist.
—Karl Marx



see also: stickereview

