

Otherworlds Review #2: Ghosts

The Otherworlds Review

October 6, 2017

October 2017 · Sun in Libra · Full moon in Aries

Hurl me into the next existence, the descent into hell won't turn me. I'll crawl back to dog his trail forever. They won't defeat my revenge, never, never. I'm part of a righteous people who anger slowly, but rage undammed. We'll gather at his door in such a number that the rumbling of our feet will make the earth tremble. – George Jackson

Say, "I am a child of Earth and starry Heaven;
But I descend from Heaven alone. This ye know yourselves.
But I am parched with thirst and I perish. Give me quickly
The cold water flowing forth from the Lake of Memory."

The sun in justice is perfectly balanced by its mirror in the sign of insurrectionary attack. The feather is weighed against the heart by the jackal, and the devourer waits to see the results. Is your heart light? "One must still have chaos in oneself to be able to give birth to a dancing star."

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In Ancient Greece, the word "hero" referred to a person who had done extraordinary deeds in life or died in unusually violent circumstances, and therefore possessed an exceptionally great amount of power after death. Heroes were worshiped with nocturnal libations and annual chthonic sacrifices at the site of their tombs, and if properly propitiated in this way, served as protectors of the town in which they were buried. If neglected, an angry ghost could make their posthumous power known by terrorizing the city until acknowledged as a hero and appeased with offerings.

In Greece today, hero cultus is still practiced. Four years after the murder of anti-fascist rapper Pavlos Fyssas (Killah P) by a neo-nazi Golden Dawn follower, two thousand people marched in Athens in his memory, explicitly honoring Heather Heyer as well. Dozens of hooded warriors attacked the police protecting Golden Dawn's offices with Molotov cocktails, chanting "Pavlos is alive! Crush the Nazis!" Their incantation reveals the unique nature of the antifascist and anarchist hero: the offering is the attack, the attack is the offering. The attack is the posthumous

demonstration of power, the posthumous demonstration of power is the attack. The anarchist martyr negates the transitional period between suffering as a haunting ghost and thriving as an honored hero. For the rest of society, our dead are eternally vengeful ghosts, their worst nightmares realized. For us, our fallen comrades are venerated through immediate action and attack.

The ancients sacrificed pigs to Demeter and Persephone, Goddesses of Earth and Underearth, by burning them whole. Demeter who single-handedly held all life on earth ransom and forced Zeus to accede to Her demands, Persephone who sends the souls of heroes back to the surface of the earth. The swine is still the most appropriate victim for the Powers Below, all-consuming fire the best method, nightfall the most auspicious time. The golden dawn is no match for the black dusk, and the annual firestorms for Pavlos, a self-described “spawn of Achilles”¹, in the nights leading to the autumnal equinox are proof. “Pavlos is alive! Crush the Nazis!” The affirmation of glorious life after death and the statement of implacable hostility towards the fascists.

Simultaneous to Pavlos’s hero-festival in Athens, Saint Louis avenges the murder of Anthony Lamar Smith at the hands of a cop, taking the war to the very homes of the enemy. A thousand people surrounded the mayor’s house and smashed her windows. In the glass shards, we scry both past and future, the all-too-timely words of Lucy Parsons, anarchist of Black and Mexican and indigenous descent, widow of the Haymarket Martyr Albert Parsons: “Let every dirty, lousy tramp arm himself with a revolver or knife on the steps of the palace of the rich and stab or shoot their owners as they come out. Let us kill them without mercy, and let it be a war of extermination and without pity.” Or, as 2Pac Shakur said, “The ground is gonna open up and swallow the evil ... the poor people is gonna open up this whole world and swallow up the rich people.” At the time of writing, the demonstrations have continued every day for a fortnight, specifically targeting rich white neighborhoods and malls, making the name of Anthony Lamar Smith unforgettable even in the palaces of the rich.

With trash can lids and bricks thrown through shop windows and at cops, a promising beginning was made towards spiritually cleansing the deep-set miasma of Delmar Boulevard, the dividing line between the Black and white neighborhoods of Saint Louis. Every border, however well fortified and guarded, is a crossroads, a liminal place, where the Man in Black or some other way-opening spirit might appear to offer sorcerous power. The inside and the outside are not static places, but exist only in relationship with one another. The shattered windows at the mayor’s house and on Delmar Boulevard demonstrate what happens when this ancient relationship is subordinated to the egregores of class and race, the false hopes of white men who fear death and would stop at nothing to cling to their paltry and fleeting secular power. Neither their homes nor their borders are impermeable. Through every broken window, a portal to the Other-worlds is opened, through which the Dead return to the earth, through which wild and inhuman spirits enter, through which the Gods make manifest Their blessings.

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The night of September 16th, police officers on the Georgia Tech campus murdered 21-year-old Scout Schultz, a queer anarchist loved by many. Following a mourning rite two nights later, some who loved them struck back against the forces responsible for Scout’s death: hospitalizing a couple police officers and setting one of their vehicles ablaze. The days to follow saw the predictable

¹ <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2017/09/greece-mourns-slain-antifascist-rapper-pavlos-fyssas-170911080142110.html>

response from the powers that be – calls for order, criminal charges, intimidations, interrogations, expulsions – so many efforts to erase Scout’s memory and the fire lit in their honor. In a subtle response, a poster circulated reprising the infamous image of a burning police cruiser with the text “no apologies,” with the date altered to read Sept 18th, 2017 – Georgia Tech. This poster originally emerged after the largest queer uprising in US history, San Francisco’s White Night Riot of 1979, and depicted one of several SFPD cruisers burnt that night.

The queer struggle remains, as always, the struggle to respond when one of us dies. The history books remember the White Night as a stepping stone in the progressive path toward gay political careerism. We understand it instead as a collective moment of response to another faggot death; a death – this time – affecting more than just a small circle of friends and lovers. And yet visible or not, we continue responding: another bashing, another dead on the streets, another shooting, another mass shooting, four dozen in a night club, three dozen in an underground venue, millions of AIDS deaths, countless suicides – by cop or not, privately or not, planned or not, always because of this society, always because of its enforced isolation, its scarcity and its industrialization of care.

Whatever story the cybernetic media says about Scout, we see through to the center of the matter: another queer death. We are aware of our own mortality – yes, we will die, just as all that draws breath must someday cease – but more, we hold a certain proximity to death. Especially the transfemme among us, the dark-skinned among us, the indigenous among us, the hustlers among us, the houseless among us, the mad ones among us, We walk with a closeness and a certainty toward death. We walk with an ambiguity too: who will remember, who will know, who survives us? We aren’t guaranteed the unbroken line of heteronormative transmission afforded our cousins. And so we find other ways, build other kinship structures, weave other webs of affinities and promiscuities, carnivals and households, love and hate, friendship and enmity in such complex and crystalline formations so that we can’t tell the dichotomy and we are left, vast and varied, subterranean, broken yet ever-necessary, extended family.

Queers, anarchists, extended, through time and space yet hyper-specifically etched into places: bars, alleyways, apartment complexes, relational memory. The great paradoxical queer ancestral current – straddling on the one hand the desire of each generation for the betterment of the next, and on the other our traditional proximity and orientation toward death – transmits to each of us an inheritance, affirming and negating all at once. And so to honor the ancestors of the tradition, while staying alive long enough to do so, we devise novel strategies of survival, techniques to walk the tightrope across the abyss of lost generations. We weave those ropes into tapestries and quilts telling stories which enable us to keep fighting. We hold to the possibility that we may choose, all of us together, to give up neither our lives nor our different-ways-of-life. We can choose to continue, because we fight for continuance and so do the dead.

Our deaths are not the end. We die, but the web remains. By means of collective grief the web is woven and rewoven, never the same but possibly fiercer, possibly more resilient, all wrapped up in the spirits of ones we loved and ones we never met. The rituals of mourning – the candles, the songs, the teary ecstasy, the storytelling, the art of memorial, the healing work, the offerings – these strengthen the web and strengthen our ghosts. (Milo dead-named our friend and then the storm swallowed his home.) And so we grieve, together and alone, all dancewoven up together, the dead like paper skeletons above us fluttering on our breath as we exhale their stories.

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In September 1923, during the Showa period of violent Imperial Japan, a 7.9 magnitude earthquake broke off the coast of Tokyo. The imperial government and vigilantes used the pretext of civil unrest to murder tens of thousands of Ethnic Koreans, with the help of the city's police. The imperial army took the same opportunity to repress political dissidents.

Kaneko Fumiko, a Japanese nihilist, and her anarchist friends were locked up, accused of precipitating the earthquake, intending to use the confusion to start a rebellion against imperial fascism. These now-ancestors were convicted of high treason for an assassination attempt on the emperor. Whether their plans truly had that aim, whether they were rounded up in the postquake chaos in the same style as we have seen after J20 and now after Scout Schultz's murder, whether these treasonous types had merely dreamed of freedom in their meager beds and burning hearts is irrelevant. The rebellious spirit is enough of a threat to any emperor, colonial force, or police force. Kaneko Fumiko's words from jail before she refused the emperor's pardon: "It does not matter whether our activities produce meaningful results or not ... [they] enable us to bring our lives immediately into harmony with our existence."

There is something to be said for tradition, though, unsurprisingly, our enemies say it wrong. "One important aspect of tradition is the consciousness of possessing the tradition – a grasp of revolutionary methods, a knowledge of what to do in a revolutionary situation." Likewise we the living possess the voices and imaginations of those before, of Kaneko Fumiko, of Scout Schultz, of the entire heavenly island of Puerto Rico.

The Ojibwa story of the constellation commonly called the Big Dipper tells of a mink who ascends to the heavens escaping greedy villagers. The selfish cousin of the mink was keeping the birds of summer locked in tiny cages to steal the warmth of spring for himself and his faithful people. The mink, along with his animal friends, determined to set summer free for all, fought his cousin and released the birds. The last of the cages of hummingbirds was smashed, but the mink came up against the angry villagers as he escaped. The stars whispered to him "Brave mink! You are one of us!" He climbed into the heavens, joining the stars. His earthly form now gratefully immortalized in clear winter skies.

This ancestor of some is an ancestor to all when the stories are told. We descend from the stars themselves. When we yell "Pavlos is alive! Crush the Nazis!" and when we're on the steps of the mayor's house without mercy, we are giving life to our own rebellious spirits by blessing our attacks with the sacred spirits of those new and old constellations we greet in our skies. Tradition is not power over another.

The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the "emergency situation" in which we live is the rule. We must arrive at a concept of history which corresponds to this. Then it will become clear that the task before us is the introduction of a real state of emergency; and our position in the struggle against Fascism will thereby improve.

Those who seek to subdue and cage – the seekers of supremacy and the makers of solitude as torture – will meet the bright mink, emptying the cages. They'll see Scout again, and Pavlos, in us on their doorstep. Those lost and taken return to us, and return to the descendants of fascists, cops, to the thieves who take life by taking away the sky. Our enemy's failure of vision will in turn fail them spectacularly when they meet the returning, strengthened ghosts of our beloved dead. The jailers didn't account for solitude being a type of freedom, even when applied with force. They didn't account for George Jackson. Or Michael Kimble. Or Assata. The Saint Louis

PD didn't account for the will of the mourning to approach the mayor's house. The fascists will reckon with the curses heaped upon them by the living and the dead they helped kill, the heroes they helped make, the hummingbirds from whom they stole flight.

In the exposed cracks we've always seen the light; in the paths our friends journeyed bravely and stubbornly, we see how their dedication to freedom brightly colored all their living moments until their last. They live now everywhere, but can be called to for guidance, for validation, for power in moments where winning comes on the wings of our ancestors in resistance. The hearts of those dead are ours to keep richly lit and dressed with fresh flowers and tokens of memory in the form of attack. The spirit of rebellion meets the spirit of tradition. Revenge makes friends with joy.

Some spirits need light, some need vengeance; Scout got both from a burning SUV and in the voice of our ancestors we say again: "No Apologies!" To this society we offer and accept none. This is an old war and we – queers, anarchic, anti-fascistic, uncontrollable, other – have been fighting for lifetimes. This conflict has many sides. Over the same weekend, cowards from Identity Evropa tweeted cellphone pictures of a lackluster 'vigil' for the "victims of anarcho-terrorism." Let McKinley's bloated corpse have Twitter posts and tealights and his name over dreadful middle schools. Our dead have May Day and plazas and entire uprisings. We can laugh at their sad attempt at ancestor veneration, but we would do well to keep an eye attending to the spiritual techniques of our enemies; attending specifically toward how we might undercut their relations and embolden ours.

For every president honored by the cynical fascists, may the millions genocided and imprisoned and enslaved under his regime rise up to swallow his memory in waves of judgement and fury.

For every anarchist executed, may new festivals of fire be born. For all of our dead may new rituals slowly impose a new shape to time, a new history.

Long life to Heather Heyer and Killah P, as long as there are walls we will write your names upon them.

Long life to Scout Schultz, may the fires give you warmth.

Long life to Anthony Lamar Smith, for whom the streets still writhe.

Long life to Leon Czolgosz, who fought for love.

Long life to Kaneko Fumiko, and all the treacherous women.

All power to the gay and anarchist ghosts.

Strength to those fighting, those imprisoned and those on the run.

Let us bring our lives immediately into harmony with our existence.

under a moonless sky

dig a pit

and set in it a fire

and with a stick

tap a rhythm upon the ground

to wake the dead

circumambulate the pit

pouring in libations
of water and wine
burn offerings to
your beloved departed
say their names
over and over
until you're screaming
singing their songs
dancing alongside them
tell them about your struggles
name your enemies
ask for their help
they're all waiting
to play their part

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