

The book cover features a central white rectangular area with text. This area is framed by a decorative border. The left and bottom borders are composed of dark purple, pointed, leaf-like shapes. The right and top borders consist of horizontal stripes in shades of yellow and orange. The background of the entire cover is a solid light yellow color.

The Buffoon

H. L. Hix

Introduction by Rupert Loydell

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Greta Oto, 2020

Introduction

'You have not wasted your time; you have helped to save the world. We are not buffoons, but very desperate men at war with a vast conspiracy.'

– G.K. Chesterton, *The Man Who Was Thursday*

Over the years I have known Harvey Hix and his writing, he has been a facilitator and editor as much as a poet and author. His previous publications have let politicians shoot themselves in the foot by the use of juxtaposed quotations (Bush and Bin Laden in *God Bless*, 2007) and facilitated – or curated – dialogues on the page between writers and artists (*Ley Lines*, 2014), writers who have never met, and writers and their past selves (*Counterclaims: Poets and Poetries, Talking Back*, 2020). In *as much as, if not more than* (2014) Hix's poems enveloped and utilised quotations from contemporary poets, whilst his sonnet sequence 'If Design Govern' in *Lines of Inquiry* (2011) writes about, from and back to a selection of major poets.

It's something of a shock then to be presented with 'The Buffoon', in many ways an unsubtle and direct sequence of

polemic, where the titular character 'serves up bullshit' and 'clogs language as tar clogs lungs'. As I write I am unsure if the opening list of Hix's work is a contents list or a poem; either way, the sequence moves on to offer short prose pieces which expand, explain and – worse – make us complicit in this buffoonery. For surely we are all implicated in 'the Dupe' character Hix has created as the Buffoon's antithesis?

Hix has written that '[e]xplanation and evaluation more often follow inspection than attention', and in the same piece ('Rationale', in *Lines of Inquiry*) goes on to argue that '[i]f a poem or painting resembles a joke in that you get it or you don't, then explanation ought to be the last resort of criticism, because it can only occur when the poem/joke is deprived of its best effect, and only as a cause of that deprivation', so I will do my best not to explain but to think around Hix's work.

The Buffoon is clearly not a trickster (though he may be 'the trickster's loutish twin') who dwells in folklore and mythology for comical, moral and humane reasons, nor is he a fool, whose innocence and childlike state reveals hypocrisy and power for what they are. The Buffoon has no morals, his bullshit and debased language is the means to power, the buffoonery a front which hides a real menace: the seeking for and abuse of power in any way possible. We might wonder where Hix got his inspiration from, but we do not have to look far, for both the USA and UK are led by buffoons at the current moment, intent on self-serving strategies, speeches and diversionary spectacles. We might ponder the connection between buffoon and *buffeted*, the effect of the Buffoon upon society, undoing decades of genuine social and cultural achievement. However, the Buffoon and their entourage are *buffered* from the effects of their own actions; it is only the Buffoon and their comrades who are able to make money in times of national unrest, emergency and

lockdown, whilst the rest of the economy and population can go to hell.

But who is it has let the Buffoon into power? The Dupes, that is *us*. We are seduced by 'a person who does silly things, usually to make other people laugh', which is how the dictionary defines buffoon. Somehow, even if we did not vote for the Buffoon (in a democratic system that thinks 6 outvoting 5 mean the 6 are right, and that this is a fair system which represents 'the voice of the people') we are complicit in allowing the Buffoon a political platform, each one of us 'a sucker for symbol over substance'. Hix is even harsher on this point, stating that '[i]n search of self-interest, the Dupe buys whatever the Buffoon is selling'. This selling is aggressive and perverse, riding on the back of deceit and scaremongering: 'The Buffoon hollers *fire* in a crowded theater, and the Dupe panics.'

And to accompany the written exploration of buffoonery, flags, collaged together from images of big business, politics, war, ecological disaster, occupation, exploitation, news and popular culture – the detritus of consumer society, Western capitalism and colonialism – assembled into recognisable bars and stripes. It may be that '[t]he Buffoon causes a lot of collateral damage', but remember it is 'the Dupe [who] buys whatever the Buffoon is selling.'

So, what are flags? They are signs of belonging, of tribe and nation, team, club or society. They are territorial (terrortorial?) and many people take this stuff seriously. In Cornwall, where I live, there are a sizeable number of residents who object to incomers like myself, even though it is tourism and incomers (not to mention grants from the European Union) which have helped move parts of the county out of severe deprivation and poverty. The Cornish flag is a white cross on a black background and regarded as a sign of resistance and separation, with many locals arguing

that Cornwall should be separate from England and the United Kingdom. On my first visit to the United States, to teach sailing at a summer camp in Michigan, the mornings began with the raising of a flag and the singing of a patriotic song. When a group of English camp instructors were asked to organise a British Day, we were naive enough to put a Union Jack up the flagpole above the American flag, only to be coldly informed that we could have been shot for doing so. The flags were hastily re-arranged, and the day proceeded uneventfully.

But flags can also be deconstructed and revealed as what they are, simply arrangements of shapes and symbols. Artist Jasper Johns layered and patterned variations of the American flag, turning it into pop art, before later re-imagining it in white. One of Tom Phillips' ongoing art projects reproduces flags he has found on old picture postcards, where poor quality print and separation has transformed any flags present in to small blurred areas of colour. Painted large they become abstract canvasses without any political or regional meaning.

We talk of things being *flagged up*, drawn to our attention; we are to take note. And we may say that we are *flagging*, tired and worn out, unable to keep up our energy or enthusiasm. Perhaps more pertinent are the signal flags used by the navy, which – along with the simple flag system used by platform managers and train guards on the railways – mean we all know what is signified by a red flag being waved. Danger!

'The Buffoon' may come as a shock to Hix's readers used to more subtlety, but it is Hix's way of waving a red flag, to warn and scare us, to remind us that '[w]e have given our hearts away to a sordid Buffoon.' We cannot be reminded of this often nor directly enough. Fascist politics must go, pandemic or no pandemic, global crisis or not. The Buffoon is still

pushing his NeoLiberal agenda, still making money out of others' despair, poverty, illness and unwillingness to speak out. As Hix's argumentative, belligerent and accomplished text makes clear, it is time to oust The Buffoon and his cronies.

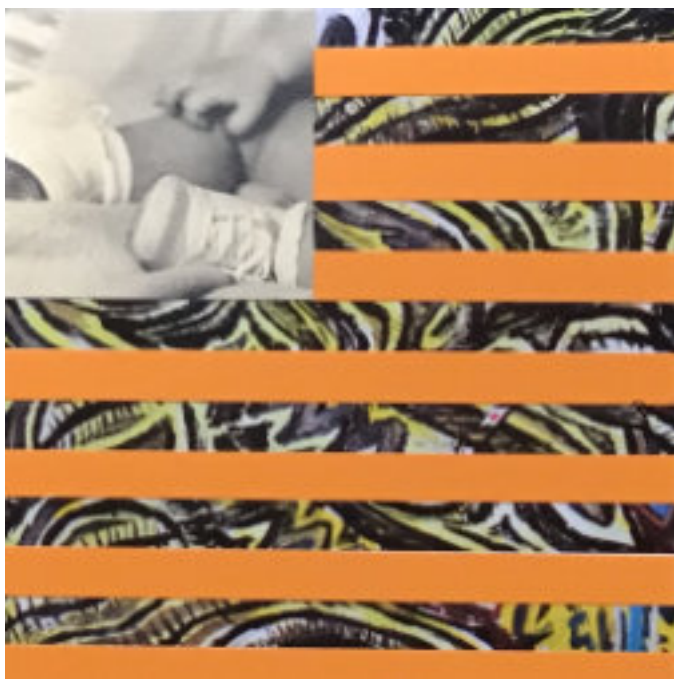
'I took him for a kind of buffoon. Now I see he is a devil.'

– Iris Murdoch, *The Green Knight*

Rupert Loydell, May 2020



The Buffoon swallows spectacle, shits plot.



They're symbiotic, the Buffoon's dupelcity and the Dupe's buffoonaticism.



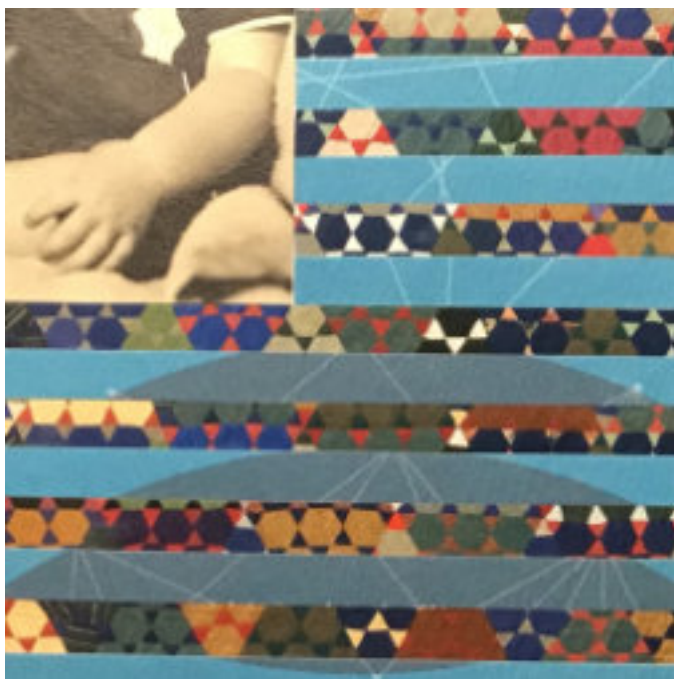
The Buffoon, the AntiAntigone.



The Buffoon smothers art under entertainment.



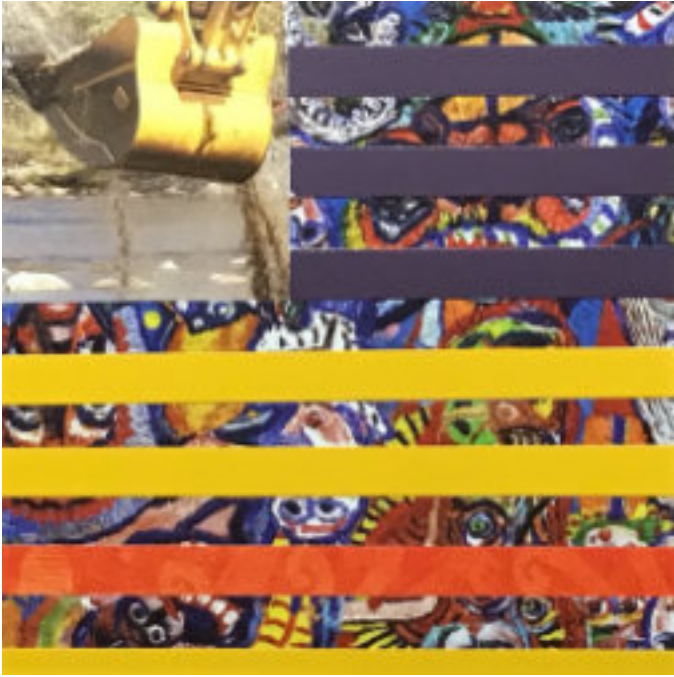
Buffoonery is truth, truth buffoonery. That is all the Dupe knows on Earth.



In search of self-interest, the Dupe buys whatever the Buffoon is selling.



For producer and consumer, the buffoontention economy substitutes user and loser.



The Dupe didn't know a hot-air buffoon can't be steered.



The Dupe is easily dupestracted.



The Buffoon forfeits approbation from the Perfect Witness to advertition from the Dupe.



The Buffoon serves up bullshit, and the Dupe eats.



The Buffoon clogs language as tar clogs lungs.



In place of scientific method, the Dupe adopts buffoontific method.



The Buffoon, in principle, could pronoun she or they, but in practice pronouns he.



The Dupe is a ventriloquist and the Buffoon a dummy, Andy Christ.



Johns prepared the way of the Buffoon, made his paths crooked.



THESE end times are brought on by the reign of the Anticchrist.



The Buffoon proves thin rather than thick.



Democracy ends in buffoonocracy.



The Buffoon is self-similar at all scales.



Abraham Bosse can etch the frontispiece for *Leviaffoon*.



The Buffoon boasts *L'argent, c'est moi.*



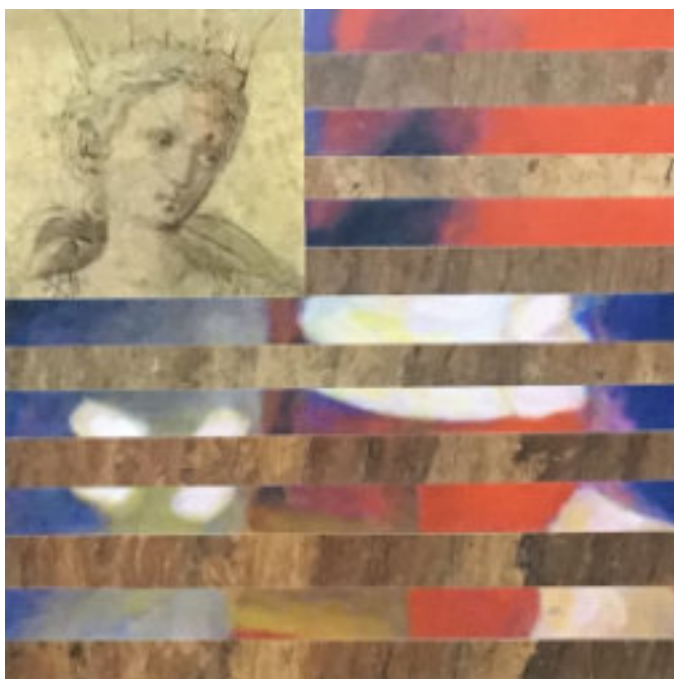
The Buffoon is a sneeze, not the virus; a symptom, not the disease itself.



There's a Dupe born every minute.



The Dupe is made, not born.



The Buffoon shouts down all but buffoonery.



The Buffoon blusters, every word under e-race-sure.



The Buffoon does the hate, the Dupe does the crime.



It's a bird... It's a plane... It's the Super Duper.



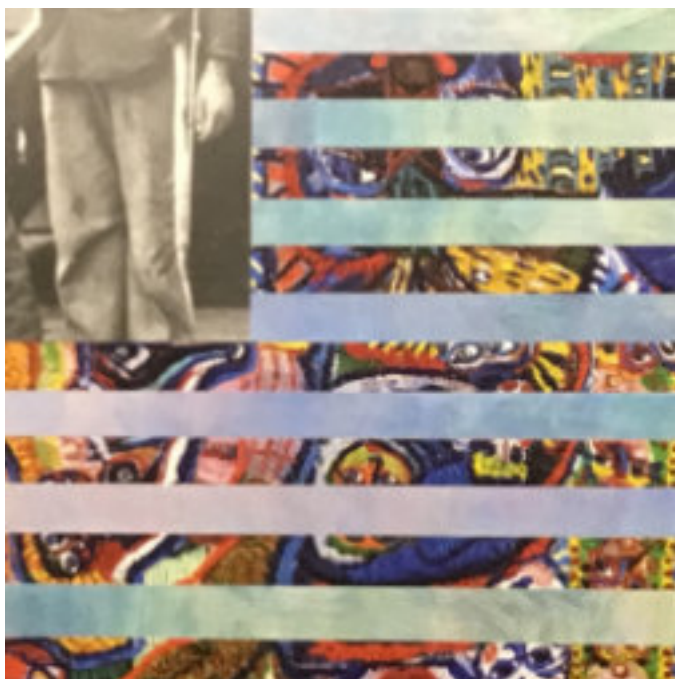
The Buffoon, the affect bellwether.



How the west was won: by the Buffooneering Spirit.



The Dupe fulfills Buffoonifest Destiny.



It's not a *still* voice that comes from all around in the Buffoonatopsis.



Raphael reports in a different register on his stay in Buffoonatopia.



Add it to holy writ: *The Art of the Buffoondoggle*.



Hard to tell Buffoonstitutional activism from originalism.



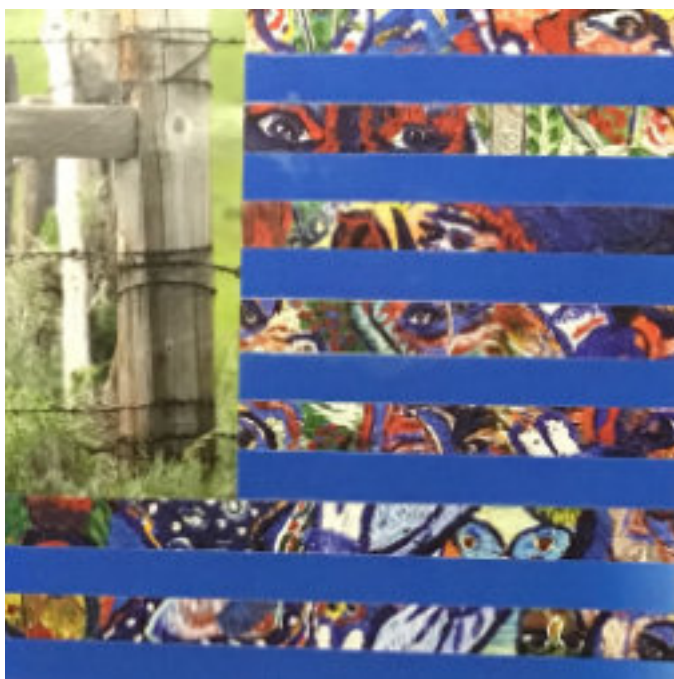
The Dupe, because dupleted.



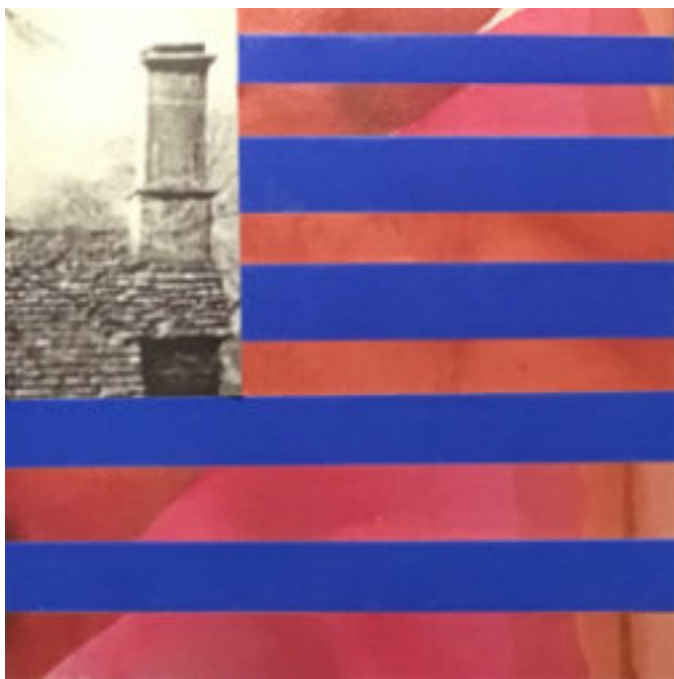
The Dupe is a buffoondamentalist.



The Dupe believes only the buffoona fide.



The Buffoon appeals to a wide dupographic.



The Buffoon mainstreams dupe supremacist beliefs.



The Buffoon floats on the sea that drowns the Dupe.



The Dupe, a sucker for symbol over substance.



We can call the documentary *Dupe Dreams*.



The Buffoon, the trickster's loutish twin.



The Buffoon hollers *fire* in a crowded theater, and the Dupe panics.



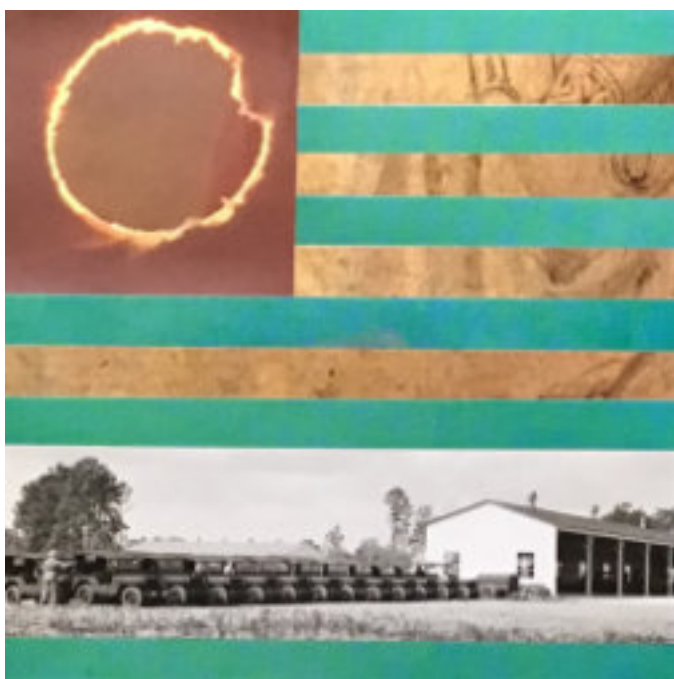
Where, oh where has the Little Man gone?



The Buffoon doesn't just copy Hitler or Mussolini; he's his own buffascist.



The Buffoon causes a lot of collateral damage.



We have given our hearts away to a sordid Buffoon.

The Buffoon swallows spectacle, shits plot: Because “it is in our actions — what we do — that we are happy or the reverse,” the “first essential,” Aristotle avers, “of Tragedy is the Plot.” Spectacle, “the least artistic of all the parts,” has “least to do with the art of poetry,” so prioritizing spectacle proves “merely monstrous and not productive of fear.” Which invites, by extrapolating from stage play to power play, recognition of spectacular decadence as (in the words of a less ancient lover of wisdom) not “a wheel that can be turned though nothing else moves with it,” but “part of the mechanism” of political corruption, social injustice, and structural violence.

They’re symbiotic, the Buffoon’s dupelicity and the Dupe’s buffoonaticism: Making a spectacle of oneself couldn’t cause harm, couldn’t *matter* at all, couldn’t *be* a part of the mechanism, in the absence of spectacle-susceptibles. It’s the perverse verso of Whitman’s “To have great poets, there must be great audiences, too”: to have a Buffoon, there must be a Dupe. To have spectacular decadence, there must be spectacular decadents. The Buffoon dupes others with, but is also duped by, his own dupelicity. The Dupe is duped by, and duped into, buffoonaticism. The Dupe’s buffoonaticism

sustains the Buffoon in his dupelicity, and the Buffoon's dupelicity sustains the Dupe in their buffoonaticism.

The Buffoon, the AntiAntigone: If Antigone is, as Judith Butler argues, "one for whom the speech act is a fatal crime," but with a fatality that "exceeds her life and enters the discourse of intelligibility as its own promising fatality," then the Buffoon is one for whom the speech act is a criminal fate, with a criminality that cripples the intelligibility of discourse, stenching it with its shitting criminality. And if, as Svetlana Boym contends, Antigone exemplifies ancient Greek theater's "transfiguration of violence into deliberation, of spectacle into performance," then the Buffoon personifies the contemporary transfiguration of deliberation into violence, of performance into spectacle.

The Buffoon smothers art under entertainment: Aristotle articulates why prioritizing spectacle over plot is poisonous; George Oppen opines why substituting entertainment for art is insidious: "entertainment ameliorates human life; art means to make human life possible."

Buffoonery is truth, truth buffoonery. That is all the Dupe knows on Earth: The Buffoon does not *prevent*, but does *divert*, the Dupe from attending to truth. In this way, the Buffoon differs in means, but resembles in end, the tyrant. As per Iris Murdoch: "One language can be more potentially truth-bearing, more precise, more beautiful, richer in concepts than another. Tyrants," she insists, "destroy language, diminish vocabulary. A language is enlarged, *improved* (value judgment), by truthful utterance. People suffer and are damaged if prevented from uttering the truth." Or, as told slant in Auden's tiny poem "Epitaph on a Tyrant," "the poetry he invented was easy to understand." Buffoon

and tyrant can be pulled apart (tyranny violates, buffoonery invites violation), but only as morning star and evening star can be pulled apart.

In search of self-interest, the Dupe buys whatever the Buffoon is selling: And goes deep in debt to do so. The Buffoon's comic character plays a tragic role because the Dupe pursues a self-deceived and self-destructive self-interest. "Why should it be *uniquely* rational to pursue one's own self-interest to the exclusion of everything else?," Amartya Sen asks in *On Ethics and Economics*. To which interrogative he adds such indicatives as: "To see any departure from self-interest maximization as evidence of irrationality must imply a rejection of the role of ethics in actual decision taking (other than some variant or other of that exotic moral view known as 'ethical egoism')." What "rational self-interest" represses is that (now from *Rationality and Freedom*) a person "is not only an entity that can enjoy one's own consumption, experience and appreciate one's welfare, and have one's goals, but also an entity that can examine one's values and objectives and choose in the light of those values and objectives." As humans, we "can ask what we want to do and how, and in that context also examine what we should want and how." By *not* thus asking and *not* thus examining, the Dupe opens wide the door through which soon the Buffoon struts. What's the matter with Kansas, indeed.

For producer and consumer, the buffoontention economy substitutes user and loser: The Buffoon does not merely *figure*, but *incarnates*, the attention economy; does not merely *impersonate*, but *personifies*; does not merely *approximate*, but *apotheosizes*. James Williams identifies one source of the problem when, having noted that many of the systems "developed to help guide our lives — systems like

news, education, law, advertising, and so on — arose in, and still assume, an environment of information scarcity,” he points out that now (in historical terms, *suddenly*) instead of attention being abundant relative to information, information is abundant and attention scarce. That inversion of relative abundance has “completely pervaded our lives,” and poses the risk “not that one’s attention will be *occupied* or *used up* by information, as though it were some finite, quantifiable resource, but rather that one will *lose control* over one’s attentional processes.” The Dupe plays loser to the Buffoon’s user, by ceding to the Buffoon control of the Dupe’s attentional processes. The Buffoon caters to attention as the highest value, unchecked and untempered by other values. As (in Kant’s formulation) it is not treating another human as a means that is wrong, but treating another human *simply* as a means, so in contemporary appallitics, it’s not the assignment of value to attention that makes the Buffoon a buffoon, but the assignment of value *exclusively* to attention, leaving it unchecked by other valuations. The Buffoon values attention as an end in itself. In the buffoontention economy, politics is, because *everything* is, a publicity stunt. The “1:59 Challenge” ain’t got nuthin’ on the Buffoon.

The Dupe didn’t know a hot-air buffoon can’t be steered:

The Buffoon is a meta-buffoon, a meretricious caricature of a meretricious caricature. As bullshit bends language, as derivatives twist the market, so the attention economy warps civil society. In his personification of the attention economy, then, the Buffoon doubly disfigures, and is doubly disfigured.

The Dupe is easily dupestracted: Kurtzberg and Gibbs note that, even when we “view ourselves as coherent, autonomous actors who control our environments,” in fact

"the coherent self is a myth," and "who we are, and how we allocate our attention, is always fragmented." Because we "interact with the world through allocating or withholding our attention in a formative process through which the self is shaped by the attention we pay to stimuli in our environment," distraction "increases the fragmentation of the self." What Kurtzberg and Gibbs say technological devices and applications do to their users, the Buffoon does to the Dupe: offers "*new realities that are more persuasive and feel better than the reality around us,*" thus compromising "our 'fundamental agency,' or our ability to live our lives, choose, and relate to others."

The Buffoon forfeits approbation from the Perfect Witness to advertition from the Dupe:

The Buffoon lusts for the attention that in broad rumor lies. In the now-most-familiar passage from "Lycidas," Milton surely meant us to hear in our heads this moment simultaneously as the end of a sentence and as a sentence unto itself: "broad rumor lies."

Fame is the spur that the clear spirit doth raise
(That last infirmity of Noble mind)
To scorn delights, and live laborious days;
But the fair Guerdon when we hope to find,
And think to burst out into sudden blaze,
Comes the blind Fury with th'abhorred shears,
And slits the thin-spun life. "But not the praise,"
Phoebus repli'd, and touch'd my trembling ears;
"Fame is no plant that grows on mortal soil,
Nor in the glistening foil
Set off to th'world, nor in broad rumor lies,
But lives and spreads aloft by those pure eyes
And perfect witness of all-judging Jove;
As he pronounces lastly on each deed,
Of so much fame in Heav'n expect thy meed."

Milton did not have to anticipate the attention economy, to offer in "Lycidas" one criterion for assessing the Buffoon in light of it. Intent on the "broad rumor" that the Dupe willingly gives, the Buffoon does not defy, but dismisses, the "perfect witness" that "all-judging Jove" apports more judiciously.

The Buffoon serves up bullshit, and the Dupe eats: I'll see your compulsive lie, the Buffoon declares, and raise you relentless bullshit. The Buffoon speaks in dungs. Harry Frankfurt distinguishes lying from bluffing: though both are "modes of misrepresentation or deception," lying "deliberately promulgates a falsehood," while bluffing is "a matter not of falsity but of fakery." Which draws bullshit closer to bluffing, because "the essence of bullshit is not that it is *false* but that it is *phony*." Unlike a lie, bullshit essentially misrepresents "neither the state of affairs to which it refers nor the beliefs of the speaker concerning that state of affairs." The bullshitter need not deceive, or even intend to deceive, about the facts, but does "attempt to deceive us about is his enterprise." His one "indispensable characteristic" is that "he misrepresents what he is up to." Bullshitter and liar alike "represent themselves falsely as endeavoring to communicate the truth. The success of each depends upon deceiving us about that," but by contrast to the liar, who covers up his attempt "to lead us away from a correct apprehension of reality" into believing "something he supposes to be false," the bullshitter hides "that the truth-values of his statements are of no central interest to him"; he intends "neither to report the truth nor to conceal it." Any appearance that the bullshit is "anarchically impulsive" arises not because it is unmotivated, but because "the motive guiding and controlling it is unconcerned with how the things about which [the bullshitter] speaks truly are." The bullshitter "is neither on the side of the true nor on the side of the false. His eye is not on the facts at all, as the eyes of

the honest man and of the liar are," unless they help "in getting away with what he says."

The Buffoon clogs language as tar clogs lungs: As Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o puts it, "The choice of language and the use to which language is put is central to a people's definition of themselves in relation to their natural and social environment, indeed in relation to the entire universe." Or, again, "The bullet was the means of the physical subjugation. Language was the means of the spiritual subjugation." Toni Morrison concurs, with equal clarity and concision, in her Nobel speech: "Oppressive language does more than represent violence, it is violence."

In place of scientific method, the Dupe adopts buffoontific method: No need to test hypotheses. In buffoontific method, bullshit having erased truth as a criterion, one stupidity steadies another, making the whole nexus of self-deceptions self-confirming.

The Buffoon, in principle, could pronounce she or they, but in practice pronouns he: The Buffoon's preferred pronoun is "he," reflecting the broad societal failure that Cameron and Shaw explore, namely that, despite the prevalence of public protestations in favor of ways of public discourse identified with women, yet "in practice, women — the group which supposedly embodies all the virtues people say they want to see more of in politics (and none of the vices they say they want to see less of) — remain marginalized, a minority at all levels." The Dupe turns out to be a dupe of the Buffoon, but also of patriarchy much more broadly.

The Dupe is a ventriloquist and the Buffoon a dummy,
Andy Christ: Joseph McCarthy only gets to *be confused with*
his contemporary, Charlie. The Buffoon gets to *be* Andy.

Johns prepared the way of the Buffoon, made his paths
crooked: In the U.S., for instance, at the turn of the
millennium: Reagan, pause, Bush Jr., pause. Johns as in John
the Baptist, but johns, too, in another sense.

THESE end times are brought on by the reign of the
Anticchrist: With that extra "c." Apparently the
tribbuffoonulation comes before the dupeture. And
apparently this, too, is a second coming, since a more
antique anticchrist beat this one to the punch line: "Nothing
is true, everything is permitted."

The Buffoon proves thin rather than thick: Thin as in sheer,
not as in skinny. Thin by opposition to Tressie McMillan
Cottom's sense of thick. *n* contrast to Cottom's attempt "to
create something meaningful that sound[s] not only like me,
but like all of me," as a result of which, she reports, her
writing was accused of being too thick, the Buffoon creates
something meaningless that sounds like no one or anyone.
Although "all U.S. citizens are allowed to speak," Cottom
points out, "not all of us are presumed by the publics to
which we belong to have the right to speak authoritatively.
Speech becomes rhetoric, or a persuasive form of speech,
only when the one speaking can make a legitimate claim to
some form of authority" such as moral authority or legal
authority, but "at every turn, black women have been
categorically excluded from being expert performers of
persuasive speech acts in the public that adjudicates our
humanity." To her unjust exclusion from authority, Cottom
responds with description thick enough to be *authoritative*.

To his unearned authority, the Buffoon responds with palaver so thin that the *authoritarian* shines right through.

Democracy ends in buffoonocracy: The shining-through of the authoritarian does not occur without consequence. The pattern Plato posits, in which democracy is replaced by tyranny, isn't far off, but Levitsky and Ziblatt give a more robust account of how democracy devolves into authoritarianism, identifying "four key indicators of authoritarian behavior" in national leaders: "Rejection of (or weak commitment to) democratic rules of the game"; "Denial of the legitimacy of political opponents"; "Toleration or encouragement of violence"; and "Readiness to curtail civil liberties of opponents, including media." Levitsky and Ziblatt trace the consistency with which autocrats behave in those four ways; I add here only that the Buffoon is true to type.

The Buffoon is self-similar at all scales: Scale invariance means the Buffoon incarnates locally, too, not only globally. Once upon a time, a nothing church college not far north of nowhere held an election for Student Body President. This was long enough ago that half the boys wore khakis and button-downs, and far enough away that half the girls had Dorothy Hamilled hair. Both candidates were white and male. At the all-college assembly devoted to the campaign, one, an earnest student, preparing to practice law, laid out his ambitious platform to meet the needs and advance the interests of students, for which he received from them polite applause. The other, whose vision extended no farther than Friday's party, proposed no platform, but instead had balloons drop from the ceiling while the loudspeakers played Kool & the Gang: "Celebrate good times, c'mon!" The seats in the staid auditorium were bolted down, in rows, but dupes danced in the aisles. And voted a buffoon into office.

Abraham Bosse can etch the frontispiece for *Leviaffoon*:

Dupes sardined into the body politic present the Buffoon as evil twin to Hobbes's sovereign. Hobbes sets his sovereign *against* the "state of nature," that worst condition for a human, or for humanity, to endure: "Whatsoever therefore is consequent to a time of Warre, where every man is Enemy to every man; the same is consequent to the time, wherein men live without other security, than what their own strength, and their own invention shall furnish them withall," he says. "In such condition, there is no place for Industry; because the fruit thereof is uncertain: and consequently no Culture of the Earth; no Navigation, nor use of the commodities that may be imported by Sea; no commodious Building; no Instruments of moving, and removing such things as require much force; no Knowledge of the face of the Earth; no account of Time; no Arts; no Letters; no Society; and which is worst of all, continuall feare, and danger of violent death; And the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short." That state of nature that Hobbes works so hard to escape from is exactly the state to which the Buffoon wants to return. Wendy Brown, in *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism*, reveals neoliberalism as "a moral-political project that aims to protect traditional hierarchies by negating the very idea of the social and radically restricting the reach of democratic political power in nation-states." By "attacks on society understood as experienced and tended in common," it undertakes to restore the condition in which every man is Enemy to every man.

The Buffoon boasts *L'argent, c'est moi*: The Dupe already believes that *l'état, c'est argent*. But similarities between the Buffoon and Louis XIV do not end with megalomania and uncurbed greed in a celebrity culture structured around vast and increasing disparities of wealth; they extend to the affective lives of the citizenry. The kinds of "absolutist

attachments" that Chloé Hogg so elegantly articulates in relation to the subjects of Louis XIV (their attempts "to connect with Louis XIV through various media and emotions") have corollaries in the affective experience of those who live in the long, dark shadow of the Buffoon. Today's "absolutist mediations" do not "nudge political subjection from a divinely ordained or naturally instituted state of being in a fixed hierarchy of orders toward a state of feeling," and they are not a "process of desacralization" begun with "intensely felt ties to the sovereign navigated in a new language of interiority, emotions, and aesthetics," but they *are* changes in modes of attachment and self-understanding no less radical than those Hogg describes. The Buffoon is not Louis XIV, but does change the citizenry irreversibly.

The Buffoon is a sneeze, not the virus; a symptom, not the disease itself: Disappearance of the symptom would accompany elimination of the disease, but merely inhibiting the symptom would cure nothing. The Buffoon is not the HIV but the Kaposi's Sarcoma, the opportunistic invader taking advantage of favorable-for-it conditions.

There's a Dupe born every minute: It's not random that P. T. Barnum gets alluded to here as an antecedent of the Buffoon. Barnum turns out to have been as bent on exclusion as the Buffoon is. As Katie Lavers and her co-authors observe, Barnum "originally presented the 'human curiosities'" (his "freak shows" featuring "a diverse range of performers with bodies that were out of the ordinary") in "the big top as part of the main show," but then "moved them into separate tents away from the big top." That decision, "in an architectonic sense, not only mapped the increasing segregation of people with 'extraordinary' bodies that was emerging at the end of the nineteenth century," but

also mapped “an emerging normate, a normate with its boundaries formed by the ‘deviant others,’” those “excluded from the big top.” The big top might be big, but it still excludes more people than it includes.

The Dupe is made, not born: I know I just said there’s a Dupe born every minute; I’m not now turning right around and contradicting that. The “born every minute” indicates quantity: it’s a figure of speech for getting at how *many* dupes make the Dupe. (My name is Dupe, for we are many.) The “made, not born” converts another pop-culture figure of speech that indicates history. To “translate” the prior figure into this figure’s concern, we could sacrifice catchiness, and have it say, “Every minute is born another who someday will become a Dupe.” You see why I kept the catchy version. The Buffoon promulgates ignorance, replicating the strategy David Michaels calls “manufacturing uncertainty,” the strategy employed successfully for decades by the tobacco industry, with its three basic messages, “cause-and-effect relationships have not been established; statistical data do not provide the answers; and more research is needed.” Michaels says that the tobacco industry’s success showed other industries “that debating the science is much easier and more effective than debating the policy.” The Buffoon learned the same lesson.

The Buffoon shouts down all but buffoonery: And thus plays the part of censorer, censoring, as compared to Lear’s fool, the role of censored one circumventing censorship.

The Buffoon blusters, every word under e-race-sure: As Back and Zavala note, “the notion of race is unstable and cannot articulate a universal definition. Nonetheless, this instability does not limit this notion, but empowers it,

granting it the possibility to infiltrate into local forms of organizing difference,” and ensuring that the “category of race continues to exercise power through racist practices that constantly reinvent themselves.” To which should be added Toni Morrison’s observation that racism and fascism are collaborators, so that, at any given time, “racism may wear a new dress, buy a new pair of boots, but neither it nor its succubus twin fascism is new or can make anything new.” The genius of that protean, racist force, fascism, she says, “is that any political structure can host the virus and virtually any developed country can become a suitable home. Fascism talks ideology, but it is really just marketing, marketing for power.”

The Buffoon does the hate, the Dupe does the crime: Hate crimes don’t just bubble up from below. They also rain (reign?) down from above. Ibram X. Kendi builds an overwhelming case for reversing the commonly-assumed cause/effect relationship: “Hate and ignorance have not driven the history of racist ideas in America. Racist policies have driven the history of racist ideas in America.” The Buffoon is taking his turn at the wheel. “Time and again,” Kendi says, “racist ideas have not been cooked up from the boiling pot of ignorance and hate. Time and again, powerful and brilliant men and women have produced racist ideas in order to justify the racist policies of their era, in order to redirect the blame for their era’s racial disparities away from those policies and onto Black people.” The Buffoon follows that pattern, a case in point for Kendi’s thesis: “Ignorance/hate=>racist ideas=>discrimination: this causal relationship is largely ahistorical. It has actually been the inverse relationship — racial discrimination led to racist ideas which led to ignorance and hate. Racial discrimination=>racist ideas=>ignorance/hate: this is the causal relationship driving America’s history of race relations.”

It's a bird... It's a plane... It's the Super Duper: Or a Duper Scooper.

The Buffoon, the affect bellwether: Sara Ahmed identifies affect aliens as “those who do not desire in the right way,” according to “classical conceptions of happiness” that regulate desire to ensure that “[a]ppropriate desire is expressed in an appropriate way toward appropriate objects.” The affect alien is acutely aware of the dissonance between her desire and the regulations against it. The Buffoon, by contrast, blithely indifferent to any regulation of desire, including self-regulation, keeps his nose to the grass, goes where grazing's good, with the flock of dupes following close behind.

How the west was won: by the Buffooning Spirit: Greg Grandin opens *The End of the Myth* with a discussion of “what became known as Turner's Frontier Thesis” (named for its proponent Frederick Jackson Turner), “which argued that the expansion of settlement across a frontier of ‘free land’ created a uniquely American form of political equality, a vibrant, forward-looking individualism.” The Frontier Thesis “took all the unbounded optimism that went into the founding of the United States and bet that the country's progress, moving forward on the frontier and into the world, would reduce racism to a remnant and leave it behind as a residue.” Such a bet made sense, though, only on the assumption that “facing west meant facing the Promised Land, an Edenic utopia where the American as the new Adam could imagine himself free from nature's limits, society's burdens, and history's ambiguities.” That is a myth, but for the U.S. no myth “has been more powerful, more invoked by more presidents, than that of pioneers advancing across an endless meridian, Onward, and then onward again.” The

Buffoon knows, though, that the Dupe can sing along to "Hotel California," and fuels his revival of racism by proposing that, now that there's no more new frontier, the only way a Dupe-inclusive *we* will make it here is by circling the wagons.

The Dupe fulfills Buffoonifest Destiny: Amy S. Greenberg points out that in 1776, "Indian peoples and European colonial powers controlled the vast expanses of the North American continent, while thirteen rebellious British colonies hugged the Atlantic coast," but that a mere "eighty years later, the United States embraced a continental empire" in consequence of a "process of American territorial expansion" that "was both facilitated and justified by a mid-nineteenth-century ideology (or national vision) known as Manifest Destiny," an ideology that "cast western expansion as natural and predetermined." Greenberg goes on to note: "Starting in the late 1830s, American politicians asserted, and many citizens believed, that God had divinely ordained the United States to grow and spread across the continent. The course of American empire, supporters insisted, was both obvious (manifest) and inexorable (destined)." Buffoonifest Destiny is ordained by the Dollar rather than by God, but not much difference otherwise.

It's not a *still* voice that comes from all around in the Buffoonatopsis: Bryant's "Thanatopsis" concerns itself with the person "who in the love of Nature holds / Communion with her visible forms," and who is ready to "Go forth, under the open sky, and list / To Nature's teachings. To such a person, Bryant's speaker offers, "from all around— / Earth and her waters, and the depths of air— / Comes a still voice." The Dupe, though, communes not with Nature but with the Screen, from which the voice that comes is anything but still.

Raphael reports in a different register on his stay in Buffoonatopia: Thomas More has Raphael report that Utopia “was conquered by somebody called Utopos,” who was “responsible for transforming a pack of ignorant savages into what is now, perhaps, the most civilized nation in the world.” Raphael is sad to report that Buffoonatopia’s history has not been so excelsioric, any pretense to civilization having been forfeited to a pack of dupes.

Add it to holy writ: *The Art of the Buffoondoggle*: If the Buffoon had a book ghostwritten for him, it might begin, “Boondoggles are my art form. Other people paint beautifully on canvas or write wonderful poetry. I like pulling boondoggles, preferably big boondoggles. It’s how I get my kicks.” But here’s one problem with replacing the social contract with “the deal” as an orienting political metaphor. When we enter into a social contract, our object is shared, mutual benefit; when we enter into a deal, each of us is after individual, private benefit. What we secure through a social contract, we secure with one another; what we secure through a deal, we secure against one another. A social contract reifies a consonance, in which each of us thinks the other’s gain is also our own gain; a deal reifies a dissonance, in which each of us thinks to have gained more than the other, to have gotten more than given.

Hard to tell Buffoonstitutional activism from originalism: It was already the case that, in Eric J. Segall’s words, “justices, not bound by precedent, who have largely unreviewable authority to decide society-defining issues, will not allow imprecise text and contested historical evidence from generations ago to stand in the way of their preferred policy preferences,” so it is not hard to imagine how unreviewable authority will behave in a buffoonstituted system.

The Dupe, because dupleted: Wendy Brown could be describing the Dupe when, in “Neoliberalism’s Frankenstein,” she characterizes “the reactionary subject of repressive desublimation” as “indifferent to ethics or justice. Malleable and manipulable, depleted of autonomy, moral self-restraint, and social comprehension, this subject is pleasure-mongering, aggressive, and perversely attached to the destructiveness and domination of its milieu.” Like Brown’s reactionary subject, the Dupe is “radically disinhibited but without intellection or moral compass in regard to itself or to others.”

The Dupe is a buffoondamentalist: Strozier, Boyd, and Jones highlight “the synergistic nature of the leader-follower relationship,” noting that “most charismatic leaders are psychologically paranoid,” and that “such leaders attract and captivate disciples, not friends.” Citing Norman Cohn, they compare contemporary leaders of mass fundamentalist movements to medieval leaders of similar movements, who were “able to impress upon the people their role as the righteous, while demonizing the enemy.” The leader-follower relationship “emboldens both parties’ conviction and reaffirms each individual’s sense of group self,” fueling the shared propensity toward violence. Just such a relationship holds between Buffoon and Dupe.

The Dupe believes only the buffoona fide: But that doesn’t make the Dupe wholly irrational. It’s true that supporting the Buffoon is not rational, in this sense: the circumstances of those who do will not be bettered by the Buffoon. But that does not mean abiding the Buffoon has no rationality at all. If the system has resulted in (and is resulting in) ever-increasing concentration of wealth, and ever-narrower

distribution of wealth (here construed narrowly as capital *and* broadly as civic entitlement and well-being), then, offered a choice between one who would smooth and enhance the system's continued functioning and one who would disrupt its functioning, if I am among those many *from* whom wealth is being transferred, rather than those few *to* whom wealth is being transferred, it is rational to support the proponent of disruption. For those many, it's true that life conditions are not bettered by the disruption, but just as true that those life conditions are worsened by the smoothing and continuity.

The Buffoon appeals to a wide dupographic: Michael and Ellen Kaplan give reason to regard the Dupe as the rule rather than the exception, as the very paradigm of the species they name "bozo sapiens." Error, they contend, "is pervasive: it seeps into thought, word, and deed. It is universal: there are no Happy Isles where humankind is free of it. And like all blemishes, it is more obvious in others than in oneself." Error, pervasive and universal. Dupes R Us.

The Buffoon mainstreams dupe supremacist beliefs: Through a corpus linguistic analysis of a white supremacist website, Andrew Brindle gives evidence "that a considerable proportion of ideology expressed by white supremacists is shared by certain mainstream political or religious conservative groups or individuals who are held to be part of mainstream society in comparison to white supremacists who are regarded as fringe elements." Similarly, David J. Caspi cites various forms of statistical evidence (surveys of police chiefs and of state police agencies, databases, and so on) to show that "far-right extremists in general" and "white-supremacists in specific, pose a significant terrorist threat to government and private institutions, as well as to public officials and ordinary civilians," a threat that "may be as grave as any threat posed by international terrorist

organizations, single issue extremists, or far-left groups.” Dupe supremacist beliefs unite and motivate the buffoonation; they underwrite calls to make Buffoonation great again.

The Buffoon floats on the sea that drowns the Dupe: It’s the sea of “narcissistic capital.” Helena Bassil-Morozow identifies accumulation of narcissistic capital as one way “of dealing with the ‘shame of smallness’, with the embarrassment of not being in control over one’s environment.” Narcissistic capital, she says, “covers a range of qualities an individual can offer to other individuals and organisations, in the process of professional or personal interaction, and includes professional success, talents and abilities, appearance, gadgets, valuable character traits, etc.” It is shared through “narcissistic exchange,” with the result that “any relationships in the narcissistic economy evolve into an operation of measuring up the exact number of traits to be exchanged: knowledge for money, youth for wealth, connections for intelligence, fame for a peace of mind.” Through narcissistic exchange, “an expensive car is acquired to make up for a lack of attractive appearance, and fashionable clothes are thought to be replacing genuine personality,” with the effect that “the paradisiacal state of psychological wholeness — the trickster state —” is replaced “by shame, boundaries and the nagging feeling that one can only be loved if one possesses enough narcissistic capital.” Qualities such as spontaneity and impulse “are carefully removed from the process of narcissistic exchange because they can wreak havoc on the barely there, barely alive, fragmented, mostly self-reliant identity, hibernating in the darkness of the psyche because it is terrified of any exposure.” In and through narcissistic exchange, Buffoon and Dupe co-create one another.

The Dupe, a sucker for symbol over substance: Wyson and Perrucci describe their time (in a book published in 2018) as a new “gilded age” of “deep inequality,” in which “a bifurcated political new normal appears to be emerging marked by symbolic gestures of support for workers combined with substantive support for policies that benefit wealthy elites and large corporations.” The same impulse that insists on flag lapel pins helps create and sustain the Buffoon.

We can call the documentary *Dupe Dreams*: Because in it fantasy and reality are at least as far apart as in the film from which its title derives, and the grounds for expecting the situation to be better in twenty years at least as tenuous.

The Buffoon, the trickster’s loutish twin: The Buffoon is the impotent hero. If, as Harold Scheub contends, “the god in the hero will forever be warring against the trickster in the hero,” and if the hero is constituted by the victory of god over trickster, then the Buffoon is the would-be hero who can’t be hero, because he has within him only a trickster, no god. David Williams, asserting that the trickster “*does exist* in both myth and culture,” finds the characteristics of the trickster appearing “not only in mythology but also in the behavior of human beings who take on the roles of clown — from the court jesters of medieval Europe to the Heyokas of the Lakota,” chief among those characteristics that “the mythic tricksters and the human clowns who play them work to turn the social order topsy-turvy, showing all of us how myopic, self-serving, and ridiculous our numerous pretensions are — each of us emperors without clothes.” The Buffoon gets the role half right: he does work to turn the social order topsy-turvy, but he does so to *confirm* our myopic, self-serving, and ridiculous pretensions.

The Buffoon hollers *fire* in a crowded theater, and the Dupe panics: The result is exactly the panic Elias Canetti describes: "The more fiercely each man 'fights for his life', the clearer it becomes that he is fighting *against* all the others who hem him in. They stand there like chairs, balustrades, closed doors, but different from these in that they are alive and hostile. They push him in this or that direction, as it suits them or, rather, as they are pushed themselves." Enclosure means no one is exempt. "Neither women, children nor old people are spared: they are not distinguished from men. Whilst the individual no longer feels himself as 'crowd', he is still completely surrounded by it. Panic is a disintegration of the crowd *within* the crowd. The individual breaks away and wants to escape from it because the crowd, as a whole, is endangered. But, because he is physically still stuck in it, he must attack it." The Buffoon shouts; the Dupe gets trampled.

Where, oh where has the Little Man gone?: Where, oh where could he be, if not in Buffoon and Dupe alike? Little Man, as Jean-Jacques Weber draws his portrait, is the prototypical language racist, for whom "where he was born, grew up, and has lived all his life" is his home and his homeland, where "everybody shares the same beliefs, values and norms," and, especially, "everybody shares the same language, the same way of speaking and the same way of thinking." But things are changing too fast for him, and these days he encounters "more and more people who seem to be different," and it's not just the supermarket cashier, it's even the *doctor*! Things "used to be better." Little Man "was the master in his house. Everybody respected him and, above all, everybody spoke the same language as him," besides the cleaner and the gardener, with whom communication required only "a few basic commands such as 'do this' or 'clean that.'" Little Man wishes "things could have stayed that way." So do the Buffoon and the Dupe.

The Buffoon doesn't just copy Hitler or Mussolini; he's his own buffascist: "Fascist politics," in Jason Stanley's account, "exchanges reality for the pronouncements of a single individual, or perhaps a political party. Regular and repeated obvious lying is part of the process by which fascist politics destroys the information space." Once the information space is destroyed, a fascist leader "can replace truth with power, ultimately lying without consequence. By replacing the world with a person, fascist politics makes us unable to assess arguments by a common standard." To apply to the figure of the Buffoon words written by Enzo Traverso about a particular politician, "He does not mobilise the masses but attracts a mass of atomised individuals, of impoverished and isolated consumers. He has not invented a new political style; he does not want to look like a soldier and does not wear a uniform. He shows off a luxurious, terribly kitschy lifestyle that resembles the backdrop of a Hollywood TV series." This politician, named by Traverso, but left unnamed here, "embodies a neoliberal anthropological model" that distinguishes him from Mussolini or Hitler. This is not your father's fascism. This is buffascism.

The Buffoon causes a lot of collateral damage: And in this way more resembles a dirty bomb than a smart bomb.

We have given our hearts away to a sordid Buffoon:
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers. Great God!
I'd rather be a pagan suckled in a creed outworn.

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About This Book

This book was composed during troubled and troubling times. One manifestation of the trouble (maybe equal parts cause of the trouble and effect of it) is cacophony, voices crowding in on one, clamoring for attention, each trying to shout down every other.

Though I can claim no outcome from my attempt (it has not slowed climate change or diminished the structural violence of our capital-stratified, hate-stained social order), I have *tried* to direct my attention away from the loudest voices, to quieter ones, to just those voices that the louder voices would forbid my listening to.

It's a pattern: the louder the voice, the more intently it attempts to control what voices I listen to.

One voice to which I listen with my fullest attention speaks to me as Glasswing, and what follows are Glasswing's words.

Paeon

For who they listen to and for what they pass on, Greta Oto here recognizes, in token of broader praise for small nonprofit presses, Atelos and Commune Editions and Tinfish Press.

Gratitude

I am grateful to Rupert Loydell for his clarifying introduction to this book, which exemplifies how his listen-first logos opposes the speak-only logos of the Buffoon, and proves again that a logos of gift sustains the community that a logos of claim would corrupt.

Plates

The images reproduced here are of collages, each 3.5" x 3.5".

Intent

This work is produced in a limited edition of 200 hard copies, and a pdf is available for free download at www.hlhix.com. Copyright 2020. Greta Oto wishes to stand askew to the marketplace: this volume is not intended for sale.

Introduction

Rupert Loydell is Senior Lecturer in the School of Writing and Journalism at Falmouth University, the editor of *Stride* magazine, and contributing editor to *International Times*. He is a widely published poet whose most recent poetry books are *Dear Mary* (Shearsman, 2017) and *A Confusion of Marys* (Shearsman, 2020). He has edited anthologies for Salt, Shearsman and KFS, written for academic journals such as *Punk & Post-Punk* (which he is on the editorial board of), *New Writing*, *Revenant*, *The Journal of Visual Art Practice*, *Text*, *Axon*, *Musicology Research*, *Short Fiction in Theory and Practice*, and contributed co-written chapters to *Brian Eno. Oblique Music* (Bloomsbury, 2016), *Critical Essays on Twin Peaks: The Return* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019) and *Listen to the Sounds!* (Routledge, forthcoming).