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SOCIAL ALTERNATIVES

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DISASTER DIALOGUES

representations of catastrophe
in word and image

Letters, and the addition or subtraction thereof

DEBORAH DE GROOT

You understand their language; understand that 'traum' is the German word for 'dream'.

You value your dream holiday, a 'traum' in time and place. You gain rosary understanding of cathedrals and culture.

What you don't understand is Dachau.

Dachau. Where your 'traum' distorts to 'trauma' and your rosy dream warps to purple...

'I am really purple', you state with drunken authority to your portrait in the mirror. You know this because the towel on the floor is purple and your feet, merging in its folds, are the same colour. But it is night and, really, everything is grey. The towel, your feet; the grey of granular night. 'In the daytime that towel is purple. So must my feet be. So must I be,' you keep on, 'it's only logical.'

You grin stupidly at yourself, looking foreign in the mirror. Looking purple, and not only because it's dark. The mirror is just a twelve-inch tile, stuck randomly to the wall of your confessional bathroom. And you are blurry and shrouded.

'Christ,' you say.

'No such thing,' your reflection smirks.

You steady yourself with a left-hand thud against the wall, studying your right hand as it grasps a green bottle by the neck and swigs it towards your mouth. You focus on the face watching you from the mirror. Too much guilt. Too much sickening stink of dust and powder; of holy frankincense and myrrh; of taste of ash and grape on your tongue.

'Fuck.' No profanity can do justice.

'F...U...C...fucking K!' you spell.

'I heard that.' Your image is catholically judgemental.

'They're only letters, just a herd of letters', you retort.

Like cows, or human contusions; purple disciples of nothing, decaying under darkening skies.

'Herded together. But not heard'.

'So what now, you think you're clever? Just because you're purple doesn't mean you're clever. I know you're not. You might be purple, but you're not clever enough to see the light, the answers, the logic', you make so much sense to yourself. In your burgundy truth, all you can see is line after line. All you can do is count line after line of numbers and letters and chalky tiles on the walls. Line after line of excuses then and humiliations now for crimes not committed. Line after ... line up the bottle once more to your gaping mouth. Suck in the blood-coloured wet. Slaughter the rigid control and rigor mortis of linear thought, like the torment of wrong and of right.

'Right? What rights? What is right?' you ask your gaunt image.

There is no answer.

'It's just not logical', you sob.

But your cinder reflection can no longer see you. You are a dirty white tangle slumped on a hard floor, heaped in disjointed contrast to the deep grey stripes of rigidity, and the black and white of your faith. Conscience murdered in the sentinel of forced normality. False and smelling foul. You crease yourself to your knees and crawl to the blackened white of the ceramic toilet bowl. Chuck up your guts and your religion in the purple grey of too much wine.

The pale finger of dawn points accusingly through the small window.

'How can it be so cold?' You are purple and the spotlight is on you. You have seen Dachau and now everything is bruised.

Author

Deborah de Groot has a BComm and BA (Honours Class 1) in Creative Writing from the University of the Sunshine Coast. She enjoys experimenting with fictocritical writing and utilises her passion for textual and image analysis to inform her creative works. Currently, Deborah tutors in Visual Communication at the University of the Sunshine Coast.