

Pesky Pests

by Robert Gear (January 2018)



Death and the Pregnant Woman, Egon Schiele, 1911

According to Elizabeth Kübler-Ross, the world-renowned authority on death and dying, there are five stages of dying: denial, rage and anger, bargaining, depression and finally, acceptance. Western Europe seems to be resolutely engaged in pursuit of all these stages on the way to civilizational extinction (although not necessarily in the order outlined by Kübler-Ross) because different elements within Europe express all these sentiments in one form or another. In nations faced with the Jihadist onslaught of the [‘shrewd-eyed dwarf’](#), these stages may be expressed in

different ways by different groups or individuals. The overall pattern is almost symphonic in structure—an interconnected artistry of continent-wide willfulness; an immense slow-motion as-yet-unfinished symphony. Dying as an art, as Plath might have expressed it. All stages of surrender (for that is what it mostly is) can be found concurrently overlapping in a grand kaleidoscopic theatre of the absurd, and perhaps it is possible to extract evidence of the underlying strands. But the elites of the continent appear to have jumped from denial to the final stage, acceptance, without bothering to spend time floundering in the intervening stages. The elites are dwarfish too, though not shrewd-eyed, at least in their complacent misunderstanding of the challenges we face. And as so often, Shakespeare nails it. So, when Calpurnia recounts her terrifying dream to her husband in a futile attempt to stop him from attending the Senate,

Horses did neigh and dying men did groan,

And ghosts did shriek and squeal about the streets.

O Caesar, these things are beyond all use, and I do fear them.

Caesar replies,

What can be avoided

Whose end is purposed by the mighty gods?

But unlike the death of individuals, which we can agree is on

the whole predictable, civilizational death perhaps can be forestalled. This could occur, for example, if the inhabitants summon up enough rage to prevent the final ruin of the continent and its magnificent accomplishments.

Denial we have had in spades from the earliest indications of the modern Islamic invasion and its woeful mutations of the European polity and civil society. Not so long ago, the rising level of anti-Semitic abuse and assaults was still being blamed on Neo-Nazis. Undoubtedly, some of this activity could and can be attributed to a sullen rebirth of this atavistic creed from indigenous quarters. And yes, such creeds still nibble around the edges of Western nations, more obviously and more acutely in nations of the old Soviet empire. But the media has been content to ignore and often hide the obvious truth that immigrants from Muslim lands bring with them a religiously prescribed and largely unquestioned anti-Semitism along with cultural beliefs and practices of a Pre-Enlightenment and Never-Enlightened illiteracy.

The rape gangs of England and elsewhere were almost without exception of Muslim background. The activities of these 'Asian' grooming gangs were initially ignored and denied by local constabularies and social workers, as heartbreakingly detailed in Peter McLoughlin's [*Easy Meat*](#). In European countries, authorities turn a blind eye to mass sexual assaults and a range of behaviors most civilized people consider unacceptable. The denial continues with every fresh Jihadist terror attack. The media and politicians do a kind of predictable, clumsy and ritualized dance to the music of time, pretending that the motives of the perpetrators are unclear or unknown.

This kind of denial in the face of frightful truths too painful to bear, or seemingly too improbable, is a common

human response. For example, in Elie Wiesel's *Night*, Moché the Beadle is expelled from the town of Sighet by the authorities as a foreign (not Hungarian) Jew. He returns some time later after a miraculous escape, to tell his story to the Jews of this town, relating in horrifying detail the cruelties and mass murder he witnessed being perpetrated by the Gestapo in the forests of Galicia.

People refused not only to believe his stories, but even to listen to them.

"He's just trying to make us pity him. What an imagination he has!"

. . . And as for Moché, he wept.

"Jews, listen to me. It's all I ask of you. I don't want money or pity. Only listen to me . . ."

I did not believe him myself [explains the narrator].

But how has denial played out in fiction? And can we learn lessons from past failures which will stiffen our resistance to the looming disaster? Literature and history are strewn with examples of failure to challenge evil. What happens when denial, rather than courageous vision confronts an ascendant enemy and where civilizations have succumbed to an aggressor's conquest?

Consider the struggle of the citizens of Oran, a town in North Africa, against the plague in Camus' *The Plague*. In this fictional example written in the immediate postwar period, certain issues resonate closely with problems faced today by European nations under a prolonged assault from an invasive force.

The possibility of early extermination of the plague bacillus was not thematically relevant to Camus' purposes. Had that been true, a different and less interesting work of fiction would have been written. The novel deals with deep and permanent issues of human existence. Humanity's response to suffering and quest for meaning in the face of suffering are implicit in the unfolding story of the spread of bubonic plague in Oran. But the initial responses of the characters foreshadow well the current belated response of Europeans in the face of an actual conquest. This truth underpins much fiction, and this is clearly exhibited by the citizens of Western nations as we confront a different kind of implacable foe. In the text, the stages of denial up to final acceptance are portrayed through characterization. For some people, acceptance may really be a forlorn hope that something will turn up at the last minute, some *deus ex machina* that leads to secular salvation. But facing the reality head on, we must know that there is no 'trim cruiser in the distance' (as William Golding put it) waiting to remove the survivors from 'the island [that] was scorched up like dead wood.' And that is a telling simile.

Commentators have argued that the plague is in fact an allegory of Nazi aggression and occupation. Of course, a complex work such as this can mean many things to many people, and certainly, at one level, no doubt this analysis is correct. Furthermore, the overall effect is to suggest the complete impotence of humanity in the face of a universe of evils. The reader, having completed the *The Plague*, is left with a feeling that we are all powerless, regardless of our actions. Surely, this sentiment is partly biographical. The narrative development appears to mirror the author's own helplessness. An astute reading of Camus' predicament under Nazi occupation suggests that he too was resigned to virtual

impotence in the face of the occupation's potential terrors. Of course, the author's erstwhile friend Jean Paul Sartre, came out of the occupation smelling much worse, but covered himself in the perfume of subterfuge so deftly sprayed on by the leftist zeitgeist.

How does the plague affect characters in the novel? Denial is at the heart of the initial chapters. In the early stages, dead rats appear in the apartment building occupied by Dr. Rieu, the central figure. The doctor himself is initially not particularly alarmed. The porter of the building, M. Michel, refuses to accept that anything is out of the ordinary. As he says to Dr. Rieu, 'There weren't no rats here . . . so someone must have brought this one from outside. Some youngster trying to be funny, most likely.' A few pages later, the porter explains to the doctor that he is feeling unwell. 'It's just swellings, but they hurt cruel . . . I must have strained myself somehow.' His denials are futile, and he becomes the first victim of the plague.

Denial is also shared by administrative authorities. They confront the contagion with complacency at first. 'Sorry,' [Dr.] Richard said, 'but I can't do anything about it. An order to that effect can be issued only by the Prefect. Anyhow, what grounds have you for supposing there's danger of contagion?' Another, older colleague is more perspicacious. 'You know,' the old doctor said, 'what they're going to tell us? That it vanished from temperate countries long ago.' That last sentence should resonate with us, so clearly does it intimate that long banished ideas can come back with a vengeance. In Oran, a committee is eventually formed and only reluctantly do the members agree to take prophylactic measures since that would require *naming* the epidemic as a plague. Eventually, the town's Prefect puts into effect some precautionary measures, although as the plague mutates and

ravishes the town's population the authorities prove ineffectual, closing the gate, as it were, after the camel has bolted. The last sentence in the following short extracts speaks volumes.

On the day after the committee meeting the fever notched another small advance. It even found its way into the papers, but discreetly; only a few brief references to it were made. On the following day, however, Rieux observed that small official notices had been just put up about the town, though in places where they would not attract much attention. It was hard to find in these notices any indication that the authorities were facing the situation squarely.

As the plague increases its toll, residents begin to show a variety of new emotions, including rage and bargaining. Rambert, a Parisian journalist plotting to escape the seemingly doomed town, rages against his inner demons. After much bargaining within himself, he decides to stay and help attend the sick, come what may. His change of heart represents a kind of fatalistic acceptance.

Perhaps the most vigorous illustration of the rage is encapsulated in the well-known passage describing the death of a child. This has to be one of the most excruciating passages in modern literature. Here is the description of the last stages of the child's illness in graphic and horrifying detail.

And, just then, the boy had a sudden spasm, as if something had bitten him in the stomach, and uttered a long, shrill wail. For moments that seemed endless he stayed in a queer, contorted position, his body racked by convulsive tremors; it was as if his frail frame were bending before the fierce

breath of the plague, breaking under the reiterated gusts of fever . . . When for the third time the fiery wave broke on him, lifting him a little, the child curled himself up and shrank away to the edge of the bed, as if in terror of the flames advancing on him, licking his limbs. A moment later, after tossing his head wildly to and fro, he flung off the blanket. From between the inflamed eyelids big tears welled up and trickled down the sunken, leaden-hued cheeks.

There are several pages devoted to the agonies of the dying child, and these are interspersed with the reactions of Dr. Rieu and other onlookers. The child's impotent rage is also that of the onlookers and of Camus himself. It is an impotent rage against an implacable and inexplicable foe.

And where is the rage in Europe? Where are the Cassandras? There are such, of course. But the often disdainful and always controlling elites are deaf to their cries. This rage is felt by some and heard by others, but the elites block their ears or actively try to suppress the sound as though dealing with an annoying bout of tinnitus. Think of the reception given to Oriani Fallaci, Gert Wilders or Tommy Robinson among others. Fallaci poured out her anger in, for example, *The Rage and the Pride* as she saw the twin towers pulverized and the encroaching Islamization of her beloved Italy. Predictably, her forthrightness led to attempted prosecution by the Italian judiciary. Fallaci's rage can be found scattered throughout her post-9/11 writings. Her *Rage and the Pride* is one long anthem of rage and, therefore, difficult to illustrate with choice quotations. She sums up in the final page thus:

What is my Europe, then, what is my Italy? . . . It is the Italy opposed to the ones about which I have been speaking

until now: an ideal Italy. An Italy not tyrannized by the sons of Allah and by the parasites, the cicadas. An Italy that loves her flag and places the right hand over her heart to salute it . . . woe betide those who want to steal it from me. Woe betide those who invade it.

Fallaci exposed her head too far above the parapet and she prudently took refuge in New York. And naturally, others who point out unsettling truths are subjected to a variety of assaults from the media, the academy and the political elites.

In *Self and Others*, R. D. Laing makes an argument that neatly encapsulates the dilemma of those who speak out against the 'family phantasy system.' He argues the following about human groups:

The close-knit groups that occur in some families and other groupings are bound together by the need to find pseudo-real experience that can be found only through the modality of phantasy . . . A false social sense of reality entails, among other things, phantasy unrecognized as such. If [an individual] begins to wake up from the family phantasy system, he can only be classified as mad or bad by the family since to them their phantasy *is* reality, and what is not their phantasy is not real.

Laing's analysis, despite his somewhat unconventional and perhaps now discredited antipsychiatry approach to mental aberration, surely explains at some level the scorn with which those who have broken away from the 'family' phantasy system (i.e. the manufactured narrative), are showered.

In the novel, depression sets in as the citizens start to

waste away emotionally as well as physically. 'None of us was capable any longer of an exalted emotion; all had trite, monotonous feelings . . . The furious revolt of the first weeks has given place to a vast despondency.'

Acceptance, Kübler-Ross' final stage, is what Camus calls 'blind endurance' and is the last emotion available with which to confront the rising death toll in the imprisoning city. Perhaps age, increasing age, is part of Europe's disease. With the average age increasing and an increasing proportion of the indigenous population childless, the strength of the European world to confront the future fails. The future, therefore, becomes of no consequence. The author hints at this tendency when Dr. Rieu asks his mother, 'Don't you ever feel alarmed, mother?' She replies, 'Oh at my age there isn't much left to fear.'

The Plague ends with the disease petering out, reminiscent of the rapid ailing of the Martians (themselves, somewhat ironically, killed off by an Earthling bacillus) in H. G. Wells' *War of the Worlds*. In both cases the invasion is self-limiting rather than destroyed by human intervention. In *The Plague*, Dr. Rieu has the final word.

None the less, he knew that the tale he had to tell could not be one of a final victory. It could be only the record of what had had to be done, and what assuredly would have to be done again in the never-ending fight against terror and its relentless onslaughts. He knew what those jubilant crowds did not know but could have learned from books: that the plague bacillus never dies or disappears for good; that it can lie dormant for years and years . . . and that perhaps the day would come when, for the bane and enlightening of men, it roused up its rats again and sent them forth to die in a happy city.

So that is Europe's (and slightly further along also that of the remaining Anglosphere nations) predicament. So long Marianne—and all the others. Or is it? Those who rage may endure or pass on a confrontational sentiment, perhaps what Auden calls 'an affirming flame.' With this, there must be some hope.

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