

Things I Learned from *The Tin Drum*

If hell's in store
for you someday,
one of its most refined forms of torture
will be to lock you
naked
in a room
filled with framed photos
of your era.

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Pendulums
do not
pendulate
serenely.

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Light attracts all
but only some will linger in semidarkness.

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The first indication I had that anything was unusually wrong
with my dad was when his best friend, Mike, who lived far
away from him, in New York, called me to tell me he was
in the hospital.
My dad's wife, who was there with him, in Atlanta, never called.

Something I Learned from *Portraits of the Mind*

Properly administered
500 grams of botox
would be enough to wipe out half the human population

Something Else I Learned from *The Tin Drum*

Disaster can't be sealed in a cellar.
It drains through the pipes with the sewage,
it seeps into gas lines,
invades every household,
and when you set your kettle of soup
on bluish flames,
you do not suspect in the least
that disaster
is bringing
your grub
to a boil.

Something I Learned from that Bluishness via Henri Michaux

A face at first bluish
after a short while
looks natural
because it's dead

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My dad loved to cook. In my eyes, he specialized in BBQ chicken, onion rings, and, especially, something he called Balboa Beef. It was some kind of beef roast permeated

with the richness of soy sauce, the stickiness of sour syrup, and the unctuousness of melted butter. He'd take a bite as he was preparing the platter for the rest of us and declare, under his breath, "Sweet as candy!," then shake his head in disbelief at the level of flavor and pleasure the morsels contained.

Things I Learned from *The Last Novel*

James Joyce said he was quite content to go down to posterity as a scissors and paste man.

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Death is not a parenthesis.

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The word *serendipity* was invented in 1754 by Horace Walpole.

Alienation was coined by Johann Gottlieb Fichte in 1801 in a piece of writing titled *A Crystal Clear Report to the General Public Concerning the Actual Essence of the Newest Philosophy: An Attempt to Force the Reader to Understand*.

More Things I Learned from *The Tin Drum*

When solid things explode,
you look at them like they are
laughing themselves to bits,
smaller and smaller bits.

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The second thing that alarmed me about my dad's presence in the hospital was a message I received on Facebook, from a total stranger. It arrived the day after Mike called, and read:

I am a vague acquaintance of your father's wife, but I know what's going on with your dad. He is in the hospital and his wife is hoping you don't come to town and interfere with her plans. She is counting on his life insurance policy.

Please forgive me if I am out of line; I may be completely wrong in letting you know about this, I don't mean to cause more grief. And PLEASE do not let her know I have contacted you, I'm already scared.

Let me know if you need or want more information.

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Ignorance goes in and out
of fashion, like jaunty hats,
which look
oh-so-good
on some people
today.

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The witnessing
of sculptural impotence
can be desired.
For example, you hate Dan Flavin
and you walk into a gallery
with a potential lover
and one of his lightbulbs
is lying in the corner.

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My friend Whitney used to be a waitress before she started her own gallery. She worked in a restaurant with low lights, high prices, middling fare. The owners of Pink's—a Hollywood hot dog haven, popular among people who have never had a Chicago dog—were regular customers. But when they visited other restaurants, they never left tips, just coupons for their crummy hot dog stand instead.

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Some sorrows have no path
provided for them.

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A prickling, stabbing sensation rises slowly from your
private parts,
follows your buttocks,
along your numbing back,
ascends your spinal column,
settles in the back of your neck,
strikes you hot and cold,
bounds down between your legs,
shrivels your already compressed genitalia,
leaps over your now bent back
and lodges itself once more behind your head,
and contracts right there,
at the moment of realization,
that someone you love
has been hopelessly hurt or killed.

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Mike told me that my dad was in the hospital because he was bleeding internally in his head, and was in a drug-induced coma.

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When you intensely crave joy
it radiates
to the rims
of your ears.

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Germans, and some others, like to tinker,
so it's better if they make curlicues in concrete
rather than leave them in their brains,
where they'll do
who-knows-what
curling and queuing and disengorging.

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After I read the Facebook message, I called the hospital.
The nurse told me my dad had just had an MRI, and
recommended that I call back in a couple of hours.

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The moon
puts up
with anything you care to imagine,
harmless megalomania.

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A cloud that's white enough
screams
 loud and voracious.

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You
can buy stuffed animals
to have some quiet
between you.

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When you're really tired of life,
you hunger for it.

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The next indication I had that anything was unusually wrong with my dad was when the nurse told me the results of the MRI.

It revealed that his wounds were not accidental but consistent with a criminal infliction
“blunt force trauma”
she said over the phone.

The internal hospital police report was more colorful. It stated: *The patient's diagnosed medical condition is consistent with having been injured by a condition commonly referred to as “Telephone Book Smack Down.” This happens when someone is hit on the side of the head with phone books, causing bleeding in the brain, but little if any external bruising.*

Something I Learned from *Thought Flights*

People are awfully nice when their life is bearing down directly on their shoulders