THIS IS MY TESTIMONY

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This Is My Testimony
testi·mo·ny:
1. a spoken or written statement
   that something is true

*how might a testimony dwell in silence*
Experiment #1
The coming-of-age writer is sitting in her first Fiction Workshop at a Liberal Arts College. She grew up devouring the stories of this country the way only an outsider could, by looking up each phrase and testing it out on her tongue. But certain pairings still catch her off guard. “Chock full of nuts.” Reveals, in an instant, her outsideness.

Experiment #2
The coming-of-age writer writes coming-of-age stories: girls surviving abortions in roiling rivers, girls fighting off fathers amongst crumbling tombstones, girls getting their periods in a field of jasmine, girls crying on flights crossing many days and oceans.

The Fiction Workshop mixes up the girls and the writer. They know it is Fiction, yet, there is an Otherness to these girls that don’t quite exist in this language, so the girls must be True to the writer, so the writer must be, at once, all these girls.

outsider:
1. a person who does not belong to a particular group

fiction:
1. invention or fabrication as opposed to fact
2. a belief that is false, but that is often held to be true because it is expedient to do so
GIRL:

My sister’s lock-jawed silence lures
prosecutors who sink their feral laws
into her primordial refusal of speech,

their devotion to the rational
scratches so-un-d into neat constitutions
of human language,

barring speech
from other realms
distinctively non-

human, annuls our sisterhood,
an experiment.
Spare her,

my sister, my muted mirror,
her animal sentence
an act of hominid piety.

Palm to palm,
the glass fogs;
her truth, partitioned, slips -

**constitution:**
1. We The People
   *(ah – ee – iiii- oopen– uup -)*

**sentence:**
1. a set of words complete in itself
   *(Like all sites of silence, we begin at the margins -)*
2. punitive
   *(by looking for “speech” in the first place, we have already failed -)*
3. deterrence
   *(my sister - but by that logic -)*
4. rehabilitation
   *(we shouldn’t be calling her -)*
5. incapacitation
   *(my sister, either -)*
Experiment #3
The coming-of-age writer is asked about Setting. None of the places in her stories have Names. But the Fiction Workshop insists.

Correction: The Fiction Workshop names the place, China.

Experiment #4
The Setting is True as long as it is foreign. They are interchangeable, is Beijing is Chengdu is Lhasa is Taiwan.

Experiment #5
The coming-of-age writer is asked about writing as an “Asian-American.” She knows she is neither parts of the equation. But the question is somehow fundamental to her ability to keep writing.

question:
1. an interrogative expression often used to test knowledge
2. torture as part of an examination
3. room for doubt
**Gua & Donald**

*chimp & boy, an experiment*

*Florida, 1931 – 1932*

**BOY:**

Your growl,  
my growl.

Father’s search for likeness,  
my biology as his son.

Your spooning,  
my spilling.

Feet wobbling yellow overalls,  
shock of your fingers pulling, upright.

Your terror of the first word,  
my babbling trials of speech.

Father’s hypothesis  
strips your animal tongue of meaning.

My imitation of you,  
self-assured in your ancient skin,

Condemns father’s experiment,  
condemns you, my sister,

To orphan, to chimp, to our superior cruelty,  
casts your infant hoots out of evolution’s dying vocabulary.

My nuclear family, one short,  
sheds memory, sheds childhood,

Your baby hairs gentle against mine,  
sheds me into the word *boy* -

**bi·ol·o·gy:**

1. the study of life  
   *(my nose, my father's nose)*

2. the workings of living systems  
   *(his imagination, my own)*

**tri·al:**

1. formal examination before a  
   competent tribunal  
   *(pa - pa - )* 

2. made or done as a test or experiment  
   *(repeat after me, pa - )* 

3. a test of faith through suffering  
   *(Come quick! She said - )* 

4. & error  
   *(I swear, she - )* 

**boy:**

1. an immature male  
   *(Here, he says, Where I end-)*

2. son  
   *(you - )*
Experiment #6

The coming-of-age writer explains her People’s definition of “Middle Kingdom,” i.e., the center, ancient. Only here would she write as if she has “A People” to speak for.

**speak:**

1. to utter words or articulate sounds with the ordinary voice
2. to serve as spokesperson
KingKong & Charles Gemora

monster & actor, film set
Hollywood, 1933

MONSTER:

The director asks his child,
“What is a name befitting
A Monster?”

Her screech, his laughter:
“She was reacting to your
yellow face.”

Director’s note:
He is the last surviving member of his species.
A very lonely creature, absolutely solitary.
It must be one of the loneliest
existences you could ever possibly

Imagine - ACTION!
His command pierces my thick costume
- I tear open my animal bellow,

Search my belly for what
they know me to be:
Fucking Little Island Boy

Never learning speech,
my gesticulations an obedient madness.
English unmoored, pure sound.

CUT! I take off
my face half-beast, half-human,
cough out hairs stuck to the roof

of my mouth, exposing myself as PingPong
(at least, that was their name for me
on set). My Hollywood dreams
Shape their fears, loom over their Empire, acrobatic monkey suit clutching their erect towers, civilization’s mask rupturing with dark desire.

Admit it - They desired me, desired to be that fallen blonde, desired to be me.

When you stand on the ground and you look up at it, the only thing that can go through your mind is: “That’s a god!”

Victorian terrors imagining my face onto their Empirical violence, secret monsters locked up in attics.

Oh, Sleeping Beasts of Asia, awaken their nightmares of Yellow Peril, Come!

Apes, Lesser men!
Primitives, Children, Madmen!
Beings possessing special powers!

Let us come for them!

**yellow peril:**
1. apes
2. lesser men
3. primitives
4. children
5. madmen
6. beings possessing special powers
Experiment #7
Only here would she have the authority to speak for a Dead Filipino Actor Dressed in a Monkey Suit.

Experiment #8
Correction: Only here would she speak for a Dead Filipino Actor Dressed in a Monkey Suit as if her story depended on it.

Experiment #9
The coming-of-age writer asks herself, Would She Write The Same Stories In China? She realizes she no longer speaks the language.

Experiment #10
The White Male Fiction Professor pauses the Fiction Workshop to check Twitter. It is 2016, the winner of the Prestigious Book Award is Vietnamese. “It Is All Politics These Days,” he says, slamming down his phone.

Experiment #11
In the Fiction Workshop, the coming-of-age writer reads other coming-of-age stories: elderly couples disguising murders at a lake house, Goth girls chain smoking in suburbia, hysterical Russian literature students. She gives herself permission to try.

Experiment #12
She sells her childhood to strangers. “Immigrant Fiction Is So Hot Right Now,” Nam Le’s character is told, in his Short Story.

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**story:**
1. an account of imaginary or real people and events told for entertainment
2. anecdote, especially an amusing one
3. a lie

**immigrant:**
1. a person who comes to a country to take up permanent residence
2. a plant or animal that becomes established in an area where it was previously unknown
Experiment #13
The coming-of-age writer attends a Nonfiction Workshop. She thinks her truth must be true here. She writes coming-of-age essays: her father sitting silent at the dinner table, her mother who is no longer her mother. The Nonfiction Workshop asks, “Where Is The Setting?”

Experiment #14
The Professor says, “Write Into The Difference Between Your Country VS. This Country.”

Experiment #15
Correction: She is asked to write for Her People.
BOY (again):

I am that feral boy raised in the laboratory of my father’s wildest imaginings.

My sister’s cry, wakes her clenched silence.

Would you believe me if I did not speak?

My testimony for her unravels - How daring it is to speak for another.

My bark awakens father’s inbred duty. Only Darwin’s first-born lives to tell: something monstrous.

His experiment concludes: Boy’s language retardation.

And I am that boy who avenges his father’s sin by dying, grasping life by my own mortal neck, calling and calling to my sister’s disquiet.

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daily tests:
memory, body size, scribbling, reflexes, depth perception, vocalization, locomotion, reactions to tickling, strength, problem solving.

daily tests:
manual dexterity, fears, equilibrium, play behavior, climbing, obedience, grasping, language comprehension, attention span.

testimony:
1. for?
(first seven days of first-born
William Erasmus Darwin’s life, his father recorded:
sneezing, hiccupping, yawning, stretching, suckling, screaming, reaction to tickling)

 retardation:
1. to hinder
(three of Charles Darwin’s children did not live past age eleven-)
2. an abnormal slowness of thought or action
 (he writes, “My children are not very robust”-)
3. a musical suspension (hidden beneath his genetic revelations -)
4. ableist slur
(marriage to his first cousin, Emma Wedgwood -)
Experiment #16
She sells her childhood to strangers.
*Correction:* translates

Experiment #17
“Immigrant” is another Identity she does not dare take on.

Experiment #18
She imagines herself into animals, non-humans, monsters.

It is, right now, the only way.
Red Peter
chimp, a report
Franz Kafka, 1917

CHIMP:

My suffering told in your language, falsifies.

Kafka’s pen = my existence
= suffering = this speech

His idiom to describe me:
head over heels.

Preposition of logic, head imposed over feet.
Reductively human.

I learned to drink his drink,
rubbed my belly in gratitude.

Am I kin to Kafka’s other creations,
antro-creature consumed

by human desire?
Is Kafka, closeted Jew,

my father? No one
thrusted a pen into my claws.

head over heels:
1. turning over completely in forward motion
(my father’s humans
metamorphosize into grotesque creatures, rotting, consuming your own flesh -)
2. madly in love
(the creatures take on a “human” clarity -)

father:
1. a male animal in relation to its natural offspring

2. an important figure in the in the origin and early history of something
Experiment #19
The coming-of-age writer greets the pine tree outside her window. Singular, being, being.

Experiment #20
The coming-of-age writer finds herself inside a dying consciousness.

dying:
1. having reached an advanced or ultimate stage of decay or disuse
Red Peter
chimp, a report
Franz Kafka, 1917

CHIMP (again):

Father famously said:
Now I can look at you in peace,
I don’t eat you anymore.

He was speaking, supposedly, to fish,
backlit in their exhibitionist’s prisons.

Father always knew how to curry
human flavor, warm enough.

prison:
1. a place of confinement for law
breakers
(Kafka’s dietary needs & refusal
to participate in conventional
modes of consumption is now
diagnosed as: atypical anorexia
nervosa, anancastic obsessive-
compulsive depressive
personality, autism, depression,
social anxiety etc.)

writer:
1. a creature
(J.M. Coetzee, a white South
African male writer, imagines
himself into a white Australian
female writer Elizabeth Costello,
who imagines herself into Red
Peter, into a corpse, into Nagle’s
unthinking bats -)

2. a creator
(language slips -)
Experiment #21

The coming-of-age writer is in the kitchen, dragging her knife across the chicken breast.

Experiment #22

She flinches.

Experiment #23

She is slicing into her own body.

Experiment #24

She greets her coming-of-age animal self.

Experiment #25

flip:
1. to cause to turn
(Kafka the writer wails through the walls of his Berlin basement)

2. to lose one’s mind or composure
(But I don’t eat you anymore! -)

3. racial slur
(His family had long abandoned the sharing of meals. Had he withdrawn time to time from his writing, would they have stayed?)

Experiment #26

Monster & Frankenstein
creature & creator, an experiment, a novel
London, 1818

Every mutant longs
for a name -

Reader, you named me after my father, but you never forgot my stitching, my holding together of unwanted, dying parts:

eyes watery white,
lustrous black hair, yellow skin.
Experiment #27
She finds herself cornered into Poetry.

Experiment #28
The Poetry Workshop is careful to distance the Speaker from the Writer.
“You Are…I Mean, The Speaker Is…”
Subject-verb disagree.

Experiment #29
The White Male Poetry Professor reads us the letters of Elizabeth Bishop. In between the syntax of her Poems, we look for her Ghost Lover.

ghost:
1. the seat of life
2. a disembodied soul
3. a faint shadow
Experiment #30
I am asked to confess the Setting.

Experiment #31
Correction: Elizabeth Bishop never confesses.

Experiment #32
The Chicana Female English Professor reads Jane Eyre, pulls from the attic, a mad Creole woman who is not Jane who is not Charlotte the writer nor me the reader nor you the reader, neither seen, nor alive.

Experiment #33
“Reader,” Jane, the White Female Protagonist, says,
Experiment #34
The woman-in-the-attic comes out of hiding, driven mad by our seeking.

Experiment #35
*Here is your voice,* the woman-in-the-attic says, before the day happens, before the others come, with their logic and sound and voice, sweeping away all that is within reach inside you, their mismatched choir rising like the year’s first flood, its dreadful expectedness

Experiment #36
The Setting: 2021, New York

Between an exiled madwoman and her storied homeland, the writer comes of age.

Experiment #37
*You are happening,* she says.
Again you wake, not yet weary of the encroaching dawn, determined to strip the real you to a world overdressed & watching -

**wake:**
1. the track left by a moving body (*such as a ship*) in a fluid (*such as water*)
NOTES

Cover Design:
- Carson Wong

Fern and Rosemary:
- *We are All Completely Besides Ourselves*, Karen Joy Fowler

Gua and Donald:

Red Peter & Franz Kafka:
- “A Report to an Academy,” Franz Kafka
- *Franz Kafka: A Biography* (1960) by Max Brod, as translated by G. Humphreys Roberts and Richard Winston
- *Elizabeth Costello*, J.M. Coetzee

King Kong:
- NYT Obituary: Charlie Gemora, 58, Had King Kong Role
- “When you stand on the ground and you look up at it, the only thing that can go through your mind is: ‘That’s a god!’”: “Kong: Skull Island’ Director Promises ‘the Biggest Kong That You’ve Seen on Screen’.” EW.com
Monster & Frankenstein:
- “Eyes watery white, lustrous black hair, yellow skin”:
  *Frankenstein; or the Modern Prometheus*, Mary Shelley

The woman-in-the-attic:
- *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte Brontë
- *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Jean Rhys

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