

An Open Source Journal published through the Auspices of the Poison Pie Publishing House, Knoxville, Tennessee

Editor-in-Chief: David J. Keffer†

Mission Statement: The purpose of An International Journal of Exploratory Meta-Living is to provide a resource for the dissemination of creative works relevant to the subject of meta-living. The journal welcomes both academic and artistic exercises expressed in any medium capable of being transmitted through the physical mechanisms of the journal. Due consideration also will be given to submissions that do not conform to these mechanisms. The journal explicitly forbids the establishment of a regular publication schedule.

Meta-Living: One useful avenue leading toward an understanding of the term meta-living is through analogy, particularly by considering meta-fiction. Wikipedia, the oracle of all contemporary knowledge, defines meta-fiction as “the literary term describing fictional writing that self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artifact in posing questions about the relationship between fiction and reality, usually using irony and self-reflection.”¹ By straight-forward analogy, meta-living is the existential term describing a manner of living that self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artifact in posing questions about the relationship between existence and reality, using irony and self-reflection among other devices. These other devices include, but are not limited to, scientific inquiry, ontology, various theologisms, sophistry, rhetoric, tomfoolery, transcendental perspectivism and, of course, the omnipresent specter of post-existential relativism.

¹<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metafiction>, accessed 2014 April 16.

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A Note on the Font: This font is Dax Compact Regular, designed by the late Hans Reichel, musician, instrument maker and font designer.

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Post-Existential Fantasy: A Definition

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Abstract: In this letter, we explore the meaning of term 'post-existential fantasy' and its application to literature.

The Poison Pie Publishing House (PPPH) describes itself as "an independent publisher specializing in post-existential fantasy generated through a non-idiomatic improvisational writing process".¹ On the application of the improvisational creative process to literature, a series of documents has been released which describe the evolving conception of the process. They begin with an initial foray into an understanding of improvised writing, including a search for examples in published literary fiction.² This document was followed by a single-page summary that attempted to capture the essence of non-idiomatic improvised writing.³ A letter describing the pursuit of an improvised novel has also recently been published.⁴

However, on the other component of the description of the PPPH, namely "post-existential fantasy", almost nothing has been written. Here we remedy that state of affairs with a letter providing a brief definition. We begin naturally, in the middle with existentialism.

Existentialism can be described as "a philosophical theory or approach that emphasizes the existence of the individual person as a free and responsible agent determining their own development through acts of will."⁵ Historically, existentialism was associated

with a sense of meaninglessness, because the champions of existentialism rejected traditional sources of meaning, once deemed absolute, in favor of defining their own moral laws from which meaning could be derived. The so-called "existential angst" is a symptom of an individual who is unable to complete the transition from belief in a traditional source of meaning to a self-defined meaning. They are able to destroy the old meaning but unable to construct a satisfactory replacement that doesn't seem unacceptably arbitrary. Left with no meaningful purpose, they despair. This sentiment is epitomized in the statement of Dr. Bernard Rieux, the protagonist of The Plague by Albert Camus, who refuses to abandon those stricken with the plague in favor of a safe retreat to his wife. Rieux says, "For nothing in the world is it worth turning one's back on what one loves. Yet that is what I'm doing, though why I do not know."⁶ There remains an inability to conceive of and to articulate a source of this self-defined meaning.

While certainly a romantic notion that makes for fine reading, there is no intrinsic quality to existentialism that links it to dread.

We now move to the first term in "post-existential fantasy". Post-existentialism, as the name implies,

follows historical existentialism. It takes from existentialism the key concept of existence as an exercise in which one must define their own meaning. However, it does not bring along the baggage of despair, once thought to be a trademark of existentialism. Instead, post-existentialism accepts the absence of absolute meaning as fact. Once thought to be the purview of exceptional thinkers, a generation raised without reliance on traditional sources of absolute meaning can readily embrace the absence without experiencing a gut-wrenching loss. Exposed to a social environment in which both good or evil can be championed through moral codes that are ultimately artificial (substitute self-created, since some may deem that these codes arise from the natural evolution of human thought), even those who experienced existential despair may eventually find a purpose that is not so flimsy as to be rejected out of hand. Post-existentialism therefore describes a rather more matter-of-fact brand of existentialism, in which one might say, "Although life is inherently meaningless, those who do not wish to experience life in that way are perfectly capable of erecting individual and social laws that provide a moral framework in which a pleasant and meaningful existence can be found all the same." (As a needlessly provocative aside, one may note that the moral framework of the post-existential society may not be all that different from the moral framework imposed by the absolute authorities of old! For example, treating others in the same manner in which you would like to be treated is still a good idea. By way of warning, voicing such an observation will endear one no more to traditionalists than to existentialists.)

We now come to the final word in "post-existential fantasy". Fantasy as a literary genre invokes thoughts of magic, imaginary creatures and supernatural beings often set in a different world. Like all genres, there are "high" and "low" elements to fantasy, reflecting among many other characteristics the quality of writing, the intent of the author to entertain or stimulate intellectual thought or both, and the designs of the author regarding the intended performance of the book in the commercial fantasy book market. Here we do

not present any critical analysis to distinguish between the gradations in the merit of fantasy writing. We leave that as an exercise to the interested reader. To those who eschew fantasy on principle, we offer no argument in defense of fantasy. We appeal rather to those who accept the possibility that good fruit occasionally can be found on trees growing in marginal fields. What is important to our point is only that fantasy allows the imagination to release some of the constraints of the physics-based reality. When one is dealing with themes that question the basis and origin of such constraints, a fantastical setting may provide exactly the necessary environment in which such an investigation can best take place. Inventing a moral framework is an act of the imagination no less than describing a mythical animal or discussing the habits of living of a people who reside in a make-believe city.

Taken together, "post-existential fantasy" appropriately suggests a juxtaposition of post-existential attitudes in a fantasy setting. No misdirection is intended in the name. Some readers may argue that existentialism and fantasy are genres that rarely cross (though there are a few examples). To our knowledge, the blending of post-existentialism and fantasy is unique to the Poison Pie Publishing House. On this point, it seems unlikely that the instances of such intersections are as rare as they seem, since both are relatively well known phenomena. What seems more likely is that, absent a catalog of commercial successes, the existing book publishing establishment sees little potential profit in promoting such works in the public awareness. (Inasmuch as publishers are obligated to generate income in order to pay their employees as well as to provide a return on investment for their investors, they have probably made a sound financial decision.)

Throwing fiduciary concerns to the winds, the PPPH specializes in "post-existential fantasy". The staff at the PPPH continues to believe that there is value in publishing a kind of work that has not previously existed, despite its lack of promise for commercial success. They believe that the role of an independent publisher is to promote independent

voices. This is a high calling, probably too rarefied for the down-to-Earth folks at the PPPH, but they accept it all the same because they perceive value in a diversity of voices and “post-existential fantasy” is, to date, a corner of the world from which no voice has yet been heard.

Addendum

On a related note, in an interview with An International Journal of Exploratory Meta-Living, the Editor-in-Chief of the Poison Pie Publishing House identified the PPPH enterprise as an exercise in exploratory meta-living. Interested readers are directed to the interview.⁷

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The Implacable Absence

A Non-Idiomatic Improvisational Duet

by Henry E. Gorton & David J. Keffer

The Implacable Absence is a post-existential fantasy in which a mushroom man, a talking bug and a doppelgänger traverse Faerie, Nirvana, and other planes of existence in search of the Deadly Galerina, an ambiguous deity from the Kingdom of Fungi.

The novel is a non-idiomatic improvisational duet because two authors engaged in a genre-defying, spontaneous (improvisational) creative process, rather than a preplanned (compositional) activity.

To add intrigue to the process, one author opted not to commit to paper his passages, contributing instead an imaginative silence. Just as in a musical duet in which one participant decides not to perform, the duet becomes equally defined by the notes one musician plays as by the absence of the notes that the other musician does not play. The active musician still responds to the other, albeit now only to the other's silence. To call this half a novel is a misnomer. It is rather a complete novel, written by two authors, one of whom is expressed in silence.

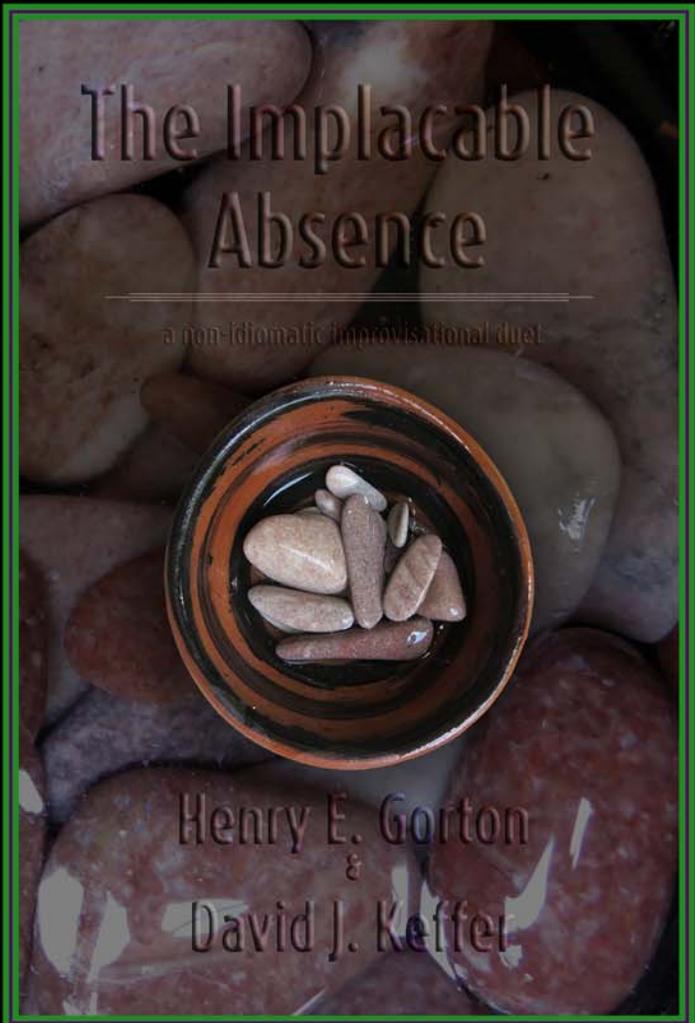


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Henry E. Gorton is currently a student in the public school system of Phoenix, Arizona. He was awarded a first place prize in the Glendale Union High School District poetry contest in the spring of 2014. This is his first novel for the Poison Pie Publishing House.



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available now at amazon.com
in paperback and ebook formats

ISBN: 1502787458
length: 85,000 words (210 pages)
written: January-August, 2014
in Phoenix, Arizona
& Knoxville, Tennessee

Poison Pie Publishing House

www.poisonpie.com