

WELCOME



# Readings in The Best American Science and Nature Writing of 2021 November/December 2022

Facilitators:

Claudia Reich,

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Senior Research Scientist at the Institute for Genomic Research.

Dirk Mol, Erstwhile Priest and Retired Psychotherapist

(This is the fourth or fifth time we have don't this study group)

(we did the 2017, 2018, and 2019 volumes)

# Agenda for Session One / 15 Oct 2022

Science Moments / Claudia

Discussion of

The Soft Butch that Couldn't / OR I Got COVID, p. 72

Heather Hogan

Update on recent research about COVID / Claudia's PP

Discussion of

The Difference Between Feeling Safe and Being Safe, p.22

Amanda Hull

# The Soft Butch that Couldn't

- What was your experience with the pandemic?
- How did we respond as a culture, as a nation, to the waves that have passed?
- Do we have COVID fatigue?

# The Difference between Feeling Safe and Being Safe

What have we learned about the virus recently?

What is it that makes it so effective?

Do we feel safe now or are we still living in fear?

How are we going to handle it in the future?



# Session 2 / 22 November 2022

- Science moment: Impact of Extreme Heat

A NYTimes ;interactive feature on current conditions in the Middle East and what might happen in the future

<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2022/11/18/world/middleeast/extreme-heat.html?action=click&module=Well&pgtype=Homepage&section=World%20News>

- Discussion: Do you have a doomsday clock? Do articles like this reset it?

# Science Moment 2

- Will Twitter survive Elon Musk or will it implode?
- Can a complex tech company that had 7500 employees survive with only 2500?
- ***Elon Musk's Twitter Teeters on the Edge After Another 1,200 Leave***

Some internal estimates showed that at least 1,200 full-time employees resigned on Thursday, three people close to the company said. Twitter had 7,500 full-time employees at the end of October, which dropped to about 3,700 after mass layoffs this month.

Now the question is whether Mr. Musk, 51, has gone too far. On Thursday, hundreds of Twitter employees [resigned](#) after Mr. Musk gave them a [deadline to decide whether to leave or stay](#). So many workers chose to depart that Twitter users began questioning whether the site would survive



# Article One

This is How We Live Now / Emily Raboteau / p. 218

- Literary Considerations
  - Who did she compose this?
  - Is it a useful style for talking about climate change?
  - What does it accomplish? Educates us? Motivates us?
  - Does it change anyone's behavior?

# Getting personal

How is my life different now than it was

- One year ago
- Ten years ago
- Thirty years ago

How is my life different than that of my parents

- when they were born
- when I was born

# Poem for THIS IS HOW WE LIVE NOW

It could have happened.  
It had to happen.  
It happened earlier. Later.  
Nearer. Farther off.  
It happened, but not to you.  
You were saved because you were the first.  
You were saved because you were the last.  
Alone. With others.  
On the right. The left.  
Because it was raining. Because of the shade.  
Because the day was sunny.

You were in luck -- there was a forest.  
You were in luck -- there were no trees.  
You were in luck -- a rake, a hook, a beam, a  
brake,  
A jamb, a turn, a quarter-inch, an instant . . .

So you're here? Still dizzy from  
another dodge, close shave, reprieve?  
One hole in the net and you slipped through?  
I couldn't be more shocked or  
speechless.  
Listen,  
how your heart pounds inside me.

[Wisława Szymborska](#)

1923-2012

Nobel Prize in Literature / 1996

# Jack Gilbert says

## A BRIEF FOR THE DEFENSE

Sorrow everywhere. Slaughter everywhere. If babies are not starving someplace, they are starving somewhere else. With flies in their nostrils. But we enjoy our lives because that's what God wants. Otherwise the mornings before summer dawn would not be made so fine. The Bengal tiger would not be fashioned so miraculously well. The poor women at the fountain are laughing together between the suffering they have known and the awfulness in their future, smiling and laughing while somebody in the village is very sick. There is laughter every day in the terrible streets of Calcutta, and the women laugh in the cages in Bombay.

If we deny our happiness, resist our satisfaction, we lessen the importance of their deprivation. we must risk delight. We can do without pleasure, But not delight. Not enjoyment. We must have the stubbornness to accept our gladness in the ruthless furnace of this world. To make injustice the only measure of our attention is to praise the Devil.

If the locomotive of the Lord runs us down,  
we should give thanks that the end had magnitude.  
We must admit there will be music despite everything.

We stand at the prow again of a small ship  
anchored late at night in the tiny port  
looking over to the sleeping island: the waterfront  
is three shuttered cafes and one naked light burning.  
To hear the faint sound of oars in the silence as a  
rowboat  
comes slowly out and then goes back is truly worth  
all the years of sorrow that are to come.

Jack Gilbert

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**Jack Gilbert** (February 18, 1925 – November 13, 2012) was an American poet

# Article Two

- Periwinkle, The Color of Poison, Modernism, and Dusk / Katy Kelleher / p. 169

## More Literary Considerations

- Why does this essay deserve a place in this anthology?
- Who would think to combine a discussion of a plant, with an exploration of color, medicine, and art?
- Her other books look equally unique

# More Names

- Other Name(s): Common Periwinkle, Earlyflowering, Evergreen, Herbe à la Capucine, Herbe de Fidélité, Lesser Periwinkle, Myrtle, Petite Pervenche, Pervenche Mineure, Small Periwinkle, Vinca minor, Vincae Minoris Herba, Vincapervinca, Violette des Morts, Violette de Serpent, Violette de Sorcier, Wintergreen.

# From RXList.com

- Periwinkle is an herb. The parts that grow above the ground are used to make medicine. Don't confuse periwinkle with Madagascar periwinkle (*Catharanthus roseus*).
- Despite serious safety concerns, periwinkle is used for “brain health” (increasing blood circulation in the brain, supporting brain metabolism, increasing mental productivity, preventing memory and concentration problems and feebleness, improving memory and thinking ability, and preventing early aging of brain cells).
- Periwinkle is also used for treating diarrhea, vaginal discharge, throat ailments, tonsillitis, chest pain, high blood pressure, sore throat, intestinal pain and swelling (inflammation), toothache, and water retention (edema). It is also used for promoting wound healing, improving the way the immune system defends the body, and for “blood-purification.”

# Poem for the week to help us contemplate darkness and light

Three darks come down together,  
Three darks close in around me:  
Day dark, year dark, dark weather.

They whisper and conspire,  
They search me and they sound me  
Hugging my private fire.

Day done, year done, storm blowing,  
Three darkneses impound me  
With dark of white snow snowing.

Three darks gang up to end me,  
To browbeat and dumbfound me.  
*Three future lights defend me.*

Robert Francis / 1901-1987



# Next week

Claudia will be leading discussions of “Cancel Earthworms“, p. 275

and “a Toxic Secret Lurks in Deep Sea“, p. 312

It’s about barrels of DDT that were dumped in the ocean off LA during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

She will send out an email with more details.

# Thought for the season

“For there is always light  
If only we’re brave enough to see it  
If only we’re brave enough to be it”

Amanda Gorman

