



WORLD AT LARGE

By

Nicholas North

Ed. Note: This story was originally published by *Soliloquies* under a different name.

WHY I LIKE IT: *Guest Editor LEVI PLATT writes...*

“...abstraction gives way to concrete particularity, a particularity that is always personal.”

We can call North’s World at Large metafiction if we like; at first glance, it certainly feels as such. But I would argue we’re mistaking the tools for the house. There is a heart here, sitting in the negative space between the words. A something that gets at our human particularity-- something North recognizes a writer is always trying to get to with our “garbage of words”.

As the reader, I prefer you go in blind here, I don't want to give you anything in terms of what to expect or how to read this text; no favorite lines or images. Just pay attention. World at Large will get at the center of you before you understand why. That initially vague impression is what will keep you coming back to North's story, its harmony of feeling.

Nick North continues to be a delightful and baffling writer to read because he uses his tools, his craft, so unapologetically. He does not insult the reader by smashing meaning or moral over their head. He respects that we are inherently curious and in wonder of everything around us. Although his tools are often intellectual discomfort and a linguistic asceticism that borders on being dogmatic in its refusal to deviate or soften its force, please make no mistake about World at Large: it is more than metafiction, which has always been "notoriously parasitic on conventional fiction for its effects". World at Large is--if Nick North will allow me to take the liberty to say-- a confession of faith; of what, I leave that to Nick and the reader to decide together.

Five Stars

WHY I LIKE IT: Fiction Editor JOEY CRUSE writes...

Nick North is just one of those writers that I like, like a tiny, challenging, delicate flower.

*Most of the time, I think of him as a creator, in this case of worlds, sitting about some form of a typing machine and bending the tensile strength of the line and what the idea of concept can be, but I also think of him (for my own humor) as the world's leading catfish – a layer of a layer of a layer of a person, who may be one of those people in the picture at the end of *The Shining*, whom I may not ever know apart from the thin veil of fiction that he produces, a person made of medium. I'm good either way. "World at Large," feels akin to how Salvador Dali feels about film, an Andalusian dog, like a flash forward in a flashback, like a nesting doll of Soviet montage, a *Budapest Hotel* – even when I try to follow the plot, I get lost in the character mindsets trying to apply their own meaning while I try to apply mine.*

I make the many comparisons to film because the sheer force of will that it takes to create fiction seemingly edited by a cinematographer. In film, you can collapse an idea upon itself, and the audience absorbs. In fiction, the process of reading and the resolution of meaning is hard to capture because the audience needs to take time and reading is hard. For North to take on the self-referential is a talent in and of itself, but for North to take the 2-D and turn it into 3-D, by compounding the literary, the imaginings of the human mind, that Cosmos-hole deep dive, and the emotional capacity to weave a metaphor in between the lines, is a brief look at the life of the mind.

We're Barton Fink-ed.

North's work is introspective, it knows that it's talking to you, the character who wrote it knows that they are talking to you, and the author knows that the language talks to you, and, in that sense, the great mystery always comes back to who wrote who first?

The chicken or the egg.

The author or the character.

The character or did the words take control and write out of the need to be seen.

The emotion or the last line.

I like this story because of the aesthetic of thought, how beautiful the insanity of our mind and choices compress to make our own reality, and the way in which we can attach emotion, have empathy, as readers, because we can recognize the fractals of our perception as an opportunity for shared consciousness.

As always, North's story is worth reading – of all the issues I've had the pleasure of working with him in, "World at Large," is his strongest.

Enjoy.

Five Stars.

QUALITY QUOTABLE (for the love of language...)

If only you would change your mind. If only you would do that. I promise I will dismantle all this improbability (that so frightens you). Promise to disassemble this frightening world-view of our world and make a new world, a pretty and not so scary world. I can do this for you.

WORLD AT LARGE

By Nicholas North

Come sempre per Carlo

1.

Last week, Vic Macarelli (artist), visited the Glasnost era museum dedicated to the work of Nikolevsky, Yev-Nikolai. The museum is located within the compound of a 10th century Orthodox nunnery in the city of Kiev—Kiyv—Ukraine and is famous for its exhibition of micro miniatures. Located in the main gallery are two rows of microscopes focused on tiny sculptures. One shows a scabies mite shod in black stilettos (*Sarcoptes scabiei laboutaine*). Another has a map of Madagascar carved on a sesame seed and a third, the Palace of Versailles, complete with *parterre* gardens, etched onto the head of a pin.

But the one Vic liked the best was *Calla Lily Trapped inside a Hair Follicle*. This consists of a microscopic long-stemmed lily inserted into a scooped-out strand of hair. Vic figured it was a hoax until he pulled away from the microscope and saw the tiny hair positioned on the slide tray.

2.

A week later, artist Mac Vicarelli visited the Brezhnev era museum dedicated to the work of Yev-Nikolai Nikolevsky. The museum is located next to a 10th century Rosicrucian cemetery in the city of Odessa—Odesa—and is famous throughout the Crimea. Inside the museum are two rows of microscopes focused on tiny mechanically-driven dioramas. The first shows the building of the Great Pyramid at Giza, complete with whip-masters and a scowling Khufu (*hw-fw*). The second has a re-enactment of Marie-Antoinette at the guillotine with a mob of ten thousand

crowded into a space the size of a molecule. This one is accompanied by a soundtrack. Mac cocked his ear to the lens and heard the queen cry 'No, not my head! Not my pretty Austrian neck!' In the last one he saw Vic Macarelli (artist) look up from the microscope in the next room and scratch his head. Mac figured Vic figured it was just a hoax.

3.

I recall quite clearly the two of us standing beside the last exhibit. You told me you didn't want to look into it—you were scared or something. 'It frightens me,' you said and shook your head, your hair coming loose as you did so and your face taking on that pouty look that how many times I've told you I love. I assured you—I said, I remember reassuring you—that none of it was real—the little parasites in high heels, the pharaoh, and the story of Vic and Mac and Kiev and Odessa was just a fabrication I put down on paper because, well, I was pissed off because things aren't like they used to be. You have a job now. I can't drink anymore (let's leave that where we found it) and there's some question about who the father is.

But understand: your neck is not on the guillotine, and you are not the queen of France. I would never do that to you. I would never inflict such atrocities upon you Maryann, any more than I would concoct some spy body to survey (in the sense of surveillance) your life (((and find out who the f***** father is)))) any more than I would throw you in front of a speeding train or sentence you to years of hard labor like a pyramid builder, while whip-masters lashed, and I watched them, thinking about you, of course, but scowling. The finest gift I received from you was a strand of your hair I recovered from the bathtub, the same day—you remember—that I bought you a rose.

‘You bought me a calla lily.’

‘A lily, right. A calla Lily. I’m sorry.’

If only you would change your mind. If only you would do that. I promise I will dismantle all this improbability (that so frightens you). Promise to disassemble this frightening world-view of our world and make a new world, a pretty and not so scary world. I can do this for you.

4.

In the final sequence of *World at Large* I have Mac looking into Yev’s last microscope. I’ve thought about this one for a while. I began the paragraph (energetically, confidently) with a gerund (ing)—Mac look-*ing*; Mac lean-*ing* forward, that is, Mac bend-*ing* down to look into the microscope but after reading it a few times, I thought, *go simple*.

Mac looked into the last microscope. He saw a big black circle. It looked like an eclipse of the sun but instead of a yellow corona this one was blue. He fiddled with the focus (you could that) and was a little shocked to discover a big eye was looking back at him. Even more shocked when he felt the force of a gale at his back. This was the breath rushing from the big nostrils just behind him in the face with the big blue eye. It was bloody disquieting and Max told himself it was just a hoax.

5.

The thing about fiction—what I love about fiction—is the way it allows us, me, to recreate our lives, to construct Edens and Utopias, from the simple garbage of words and the common stink

of languages, the shit, even, of speech, the rancidness of slang and the cruel combustion waiting to explode inside the neologism—too many examples to quote, let's move on.

There are two endings to this story. I do not know which is the real ending or which is the best ending. I do not know who the father is or if it was Mary Ann's hair (a single clean strand) I recovered from the bathtub. But I do know that was the day I bought her a calla lily (actually, a rose).

6.

In another room of the same museum Vic looked into the last microscope and saw Mac looking at a big black circle. He saw him pull away in shock and then tremble due to the rush of air at his back. Vic knew Mac had seen a big blue eye with golden flecks in it staring back at him. Mac didn't know whose eye it was of course but Vic knew that his own eye was blue and there were not only flecks in it but they were—

7.

Because this is fiction and because my name is Nick, the following can happen, does happen. Marie-Ann goes into the museum and looks into the first microscope. What she sees is the hair I recovered from the bathtub lovingly combined with a calla lily (single long stem) I bought her the same day. In the next, a blue sky followed by a sunset, lurid yet romantic. In the next, a Cross and Rose both dating to the 10 century (that explains the rose). In the next, two Rosicrucian symbols (a rose by any other name. A lily? A calla lily?) In the next, two cymbals. In the next, our beating hearts beating together. This one comes with a soundtrack and when

Marie-Annette cocks her ear to the lens she can hear the sound of our lovemaking. In the last frame, an eye, mine, I believe, is looking back at her. She knows this eye, blue, my eye and there are not only flecks in it but just as Vic is thinking (and Nick is writing) Marie-Antoinette (who knows who the father is) is saying

‘Golden’.

I would like to think he has my eyes.

I would like to think I have his eye.

My name is Nick. I am Nick. My name is Nikolai Nikolevsky. I am Yev. This is fiction and I do not exist.

AUTHOR’S NOTE: *This story is not representative of my recent work, but it does subscribe to my intent of crafting exotic structures at the extremities of literature. My interest now is in the anti-narrative. I see stories about relationships, slice of life, personal experiences, as written illustrations of psychological transactions and life principles and the vast literary possibilities they present are too often absent.*

AUTHOR BIO: Patroclus NN lives in the Big Bad (aka Toronto) where he swings with Achilles CP and other *aristos*. He speaks English and Italian.

GUEST EDITOR BIO: L.W. Platt currently resides in Pennsylvania and is a recent graduate of Utah Valley University, though Missouri is where he writes from and will always be home to him. He’s taken to preoccupying himself with that space where language braces up against living and then completely fails. Sometimes he finishes what he writes. His essay “**A strange mixture, only to be found on the American continent**” appeared in Issue 9 (Nonfiction). He frequently guest edits at FOTD.