

AN EXCERPT FROM
THE BAD NEWS BOOK
ALI DIPP

IV. A Shame of my Own, a Place All Alone

When shame manifests, it sits like the blanketing, unbrilliant light in west Texas. While it transpires invisibly, we carry it like the weight of a dead. I have the largest secret in the world. There is no resisting the allure of love. While one wishes love was a choice, alas, it comes, a raging deluge. The shame of my love bears heftily.

Solemnly, in whispering tones, perhaps in a confessional booth somewhere in a church on the outskirts of town, I pledge allegiance to a contentious state. An ugly state. A state not nearly as fetching as shores, valleys, or rivers, or your idyllic American conjuring (muse what you must). A state beginning with the letter ‘T’ (I guarantee nobody thinks of Tennessee).

Look, inherent affinities don’t come from pride. The term ‘Texan pride,’ doesn’t account for my conflicts. Trust me, if you know anything about Texas history, you’d be hard-pressed to celebrate. Pillaged land, colonial religion, and a gaggle of the most wretched outlaws and God-forsaken losers (those who had no home or bearing in the established East). All these crazies coalescing in a titled claimed as “legacy”.

In Mexican cuisine, there are parts of the pig termed ‘offals.’ Yes, your phonetics is correct if you pronounced it ‘awful.’ Absolutely not a pun implied, but there’s merit to that presumption. Most people throw away the offal of the beef and pig. I will spare you the nitty-gritty, but take a look on the world wide web if you’re so inclined (it’s fine to search if you don’t care to eat anytime soon). Now, if you’ve seen the pictures, or at least have a curious enough imagination, you might assume offal as egregious cuisine. The food

you’d politely decline in a restaurant (usually coded in the highfalutin language on menus. The text chefs conjure for chefs). The reason I tease the offal is not to bore you. This is a great metaphor for Texas—red, juicy, lauded, flavorful, conflicting and undesirable to some. The offal, in all its succulence, is uncannily similar to the state.

These adjectives might scare away most from Texas. With all its flaws, who on earth can associate pride with a state bloated in ineptitude, corruption, and hardship? If I am to write this letter to the dead, I cannot expunge my grandfather from his state. Invariably, his state becomes mine. It is on the soil of this place where he, immigrating from Mexico, began his American life.

Moving between worlds, my grandfather birthed his lineage in a new nation. Therefore, as a predecessor of his American seed, I juggle critique and endearment for the state. While critical, I am still indebted to the land. I love to hate and hate to love. Perhaps both sides of hate and love play crucial roles in demanding a better future. In its tough love, critique *invests* in the imaginative possibilities. Represented present and remediating future(s) serve a whole *enchilada* of ‘Texas.’ What does it mean to hold reverence for a myth while also humoring, in play, the ground that both bores and buries us? Here on the earth declared both wretched and beloved?

Provincialism has a dangerous connotation—rightfully. One implicitly conjures the image of perspiring men buttered in grease screaming chauvinistic chants. Having the bread with their butter, too. Provincial and unadulterated pride even poisons our regional

literature. Texas writers themselves grieve the deficits within the State's canon.

In his collection of essays, *In a Narrow Grave*, Larry McMurtry describes the perils of our State's writers in his essay "Southwestern Literature?" The question mark is apt in this scenario. When McMurtry wrote this book in 1968, the literary landscape there was about as uneventful as the majority of the West Texas landscape. And for the books published about the state, most of the works illustrated the corrosive effects of patriotic zealotry.

Even the greats, such as Walter Prescott Webb, succumb to mushy affection, "the farther his work took him from the borders of his native state the clearer and more effective he became and the safer he was from the blurring effects of sentiment" ("Southwestern Literature" from *In a Narrow Grave*, McMurtry). The writer commits a crime, as stated by McMurtry, Webb's words marry with his staunch pride. Perhaps a little distance would have done Webb some good. But being so infatuated by the state, his own love enraptured him into a complicated affection. Sure enough, if left untreated, provincial affection bleeds into affliction. This threat strikes living fear into me. Having only written about the place, I wonder what must be done to ensure a critical vantage. Engrossed in ardor, must I tame, cool, and calculate this fervor for the place I adore? To see with clarity, must we turn our back on pride? I wonder the value of critical distance, as we commit treason to assuage a mother land's errors. Does all criticism sharpen its knife?

Well, these questions can keep anyone busy for a while. Most resolve to touch them with a pole the length of the Dallas Cowboys' field. Distance is a great arbitrator for those who flirt

with ambiguity. Nobody to blame, there is a painlessness to distance, something safe in farness. It is easy for a cynic to dismiss the state. Simple to implicate Texas. It's a state of brash values akin to Toby Keith's jingoism "Cause we'll put a boot in your ass, it's the American way" ("Courtesy of The Red, White, and Blue", Toby Keith). Leave it at that, vault sealed as the deal. A closure like that aforementioned is nice and clean, crisp, contained.

Cynics celebrate their boxes...the gift of shaming an entire territory silences nuanced questions and conundrums. But to humor ghosts is, in every sense, an eternal conundrum. Carrying a forefather beyond the grave requires the efficacy of life and death. To move between the two, a border nears forever. Therefore, may our love across borders, graves, and mortality, like *Día de Los Muertos*, entertain peripheries between life and death. On the verge of a breakdown, coalescing testaments (new and old), placed and placeless, are all catastrophically close.



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