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Necrosis

Mixed media

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To the Reader

The thing about Necrosis is that it is everywhere. Although literally it is a medical phenomenon of rot due to lack of blood flow, necrosis seeps deep into the world's bones. Necrosis is one word. A secondary effect. A horrible, absolutely grotesque end to meet if not caught in time. Humans can rot while simultaneously watching themselves rot; a luxury not only reserved for the deceased. Mothers tell their children to put on their gloves in the wintertime. "Frostbite will make your fingers and toes fall off," they say. My mother would say this to me. What my mother and all the others are missing is the simple fact that there are millions of ways to start a rot. History does not hold back. In all the little corners the rot is waiting to reveal itself. It connects itself to all of us whether you are the oppressor or the oppressed. The details contained within the next 10 or so pages refer to the rot through my eyes. Past details that contribute to the grotesque metaphor I've built.

My Notes on Necrosis

The Necroid was born from a dark place. It starts a mild feeling, a disbalance. As time destroys the atoms making up one's soul, the necrosis grows and grows. A blue tint. Maybe a specific event. A trauma. You are sitting in your living room and your sweet *abba*, who never cries, is tearing up like your little sister does. Eyes that you didn't know you had open, and for the first time a genuine understanding that unpleasantness is inescapable knocks you to the floor. A little piece of the flesh inside your heart rots away. Imagine the worst betrayal. What comes to mind? Take that and make it even worse. Combine that feeling with the feeling of your favorite pet dying. Necrosis feeds off situations and emotions like that. It gobbles on the darkness collecting and the size of the rot increases. By now, you've noticed the emptiness. If you tried, your hand could

squeeze through the hole. How am I alive? You wonder, ponder, and turn this over for so long in your head that it almost loses its meaning.

Every morning you wake up and the hole is larger.

- I. Denial. *You tell yourself that everything is okay. Nothing could be wrong.*
- II. Anger. *You act up. Distraction in chaos. This won't work.*
- III. Bargaining. *What if? You can't change the past and it haunts you.*
- IV. Necrosis. *You are a Necroid and you accept that fact. Life continues even with a rotting soul.*

Necrosis is inflicted deeper each time you blame yourself fully for something you can't control, but also every time you blame someone else for something you know you did. Every time someone hurts you and you can't do anything to hurt them back. Anytime you go out of your way to hurt yourself and end up causing damage to other people's souls as well. Whenever you commit evil and feel the empathy slipping from you. No remorse, just the empty husk of the Necroid consuming your psyche.

You feel so sick. Nothing is physically wrong of course, but still. You can't sleep, you can't eat, and you don't even feel lonely anymore. Nausea is an absolute must. What can you do? There's a hole in your chest. Any website will tell you this: mental illness directly correlates with things like heart attacks and strokes (WebMD). Depression correlates with chronic disease. Schizophrenia sees spikes in heart and lung problems. Insomnia just makes everything worse (WebMD). Makes the necrosis seem so much more incredibly real. You have to remind yourself it's not. There's not a hole in your chest that anyone else can see, only you can feel it. That emptiness, that rot.

The act of associating a word with an emotion plays an integral part in the process of feeling it. You feel emotions with prior concept knowledge, as in knowledge of the context for why you should feel sad or angry or happy (The knowledge that spiders are scary). This plus external input from your senses and internal feelings creates the emotion (Lindquist). Think of language as a part of the concept knowledge required for knowing how you feel. If you don't label your fear as fear is it even fear? The feeling associated with metaphorical necrosis is so specific it is a physical feeling. Humans experience a form of "label feedback" as a way of reaffirming the emotion (Lindquist). With some emotions, this reaffirmation leads to a spiral. With necrosis it leads to earth-shattering self-awareness. Awareness that can eventually, with great practice, lead to emotional maturity. Acceptance of the feeling is the best way to cope with it.

Necrosis in the Literal Sense

Necrosis (Noun)

Necrosis is the death of body tissue. It occurs when there is too little blood flow to certain parts of the body. There are many different ways for this to happen. It cannot be reversed. When large areas of tissue die it is called gangrene (Greco).

Medically speaking, necrosis is divided into five different types (Whitlock). The first is hypoxia, which is the necrosis of an organ. This happens when there's not enough blood flow to the organ. Symptoms are shock and respiratory failure. The second is necrosis caused by physical agents. Think trauma/injury, low/high-temperature exposure (frostbite), radiation, and electric shock. These can all reduce blood flow to an area of the body. Next is necrosis from a chemical agent like poison, drugs, and recreational drugs. Intravenous drug abuse can cause the injection site to become gangrenous. Then, some biological agents lead to necrosis. Bacterial, Viral, and Fungal infections can all travel to this affliction. Lastly is necrosis caused by immunological

reactions. This includes avascular necrosis, which is necrosis of the joints, that happens in patients with AIDS along with other autoimmune responses that cut off blood flow (Avascular). Blood vessel diseases and clots can also cause necrosis. Not to mention diabetes. Diabetes can have gangrene as a side effect (Gangrene). We aren't as safe from rot as we think we are.

Symptoms tend to be very obvious. On the skin, you might see blue/black tints, feel severe pain, lose feeling, and have foul-smelling discharge. Necrosis deep below the skin may show as red. Internal necrosis of any kind is marked by confusion, fever, gas in the tissue beneath the skin, general ill feeling, low blood pressure, and awful pain.

If you are worried, don't be! There are many different tests and treatments. If you are riddled with necrosis it isn't the end, that is, if you catch it early enough. Doctors will do a special X-ray on your arteries. They will test your blood to see if your white blood cell count is high. They will do a CT scan, test the culture of the bacteria from your injury, and examine your flesh under a microscope. If it is true, and you have necrosis of any kind, there are a couple of different options. Antibiotics and tissue removal are the first steps. If large enough, amputation is the way to go. In unstable patients, an ICU trip may be necessary along with a hyperbaric chamber for oxygen (Whitlock). This is all easily preventable if you take care of yourself, of course, but sometimes that can be difficult. An ICU trip may not be accessible for everyone. Not everyone can take a clean shower. Some don't have access to the water, or the water they do have is unsafe. Some people can't get out of bed to do it. For vulnerable groups, necrosis may not be that easily skirted around.

The Black Death

The premise of the Black Death (*Yersinia Pestis*) is taught in almost every school. You have most definitely heard of this event. The basic idea is that it was rats in England. Rats in

England are at fault for the spread of the entire disease. That is what I was taught, too. However, the truth is slightly different. Truthfully, the plague started in inner east Asia circa 1347. The Djanibek Khan (of the Mongol Golden horde) was attempting to besiege a trading port town called Kaffa in Crimea. His army was greatly affected by the plague, and so with nothing else to do the Khan ordered his people to throw the infected bodies into the town. Kaffa being a trading port carried the disease to North Africa, mainland Italy, Sicily, Spain, and France within the year. In August of 1348, the Black Death hit England. This is where the rats come in. Rats would carry fleas with the plague along trade routes causing occurrences through the 1400s. The fleas would find new homes in humans and start outbreaks almost yearly (Britannica).

There are three kinds of plague. Scientists today generally agree the Black Death from back then would have been a combination of all three, as they build on each other. The first kind is the bubonic plague. It begins with a fever, chills, weakness, and notably swollen lymph nodes. Then there is the pneumonic plague. As the name suggests, like pneumonia, this form targets the lungs. Symptoms are more exaggerated here and include shock, bleeding, and necrosis. Lastly comes the septicemic plague. Necrosis is the main sign. People would cough up blood (Plague). During the period in which Europe was ravaged by the Black Death, whole families, communities, and royal bloodlines were decimated. While everyone was affected, it is worth it to mention the poor had it the absolute worst. People dropped like flies. The mortality rate stretches between one-eighth and two-thirds of the population depending on the country. With all the death came an era of superstition and a fascination with mortality (Britannica). Everyone was obsessed with death. Times such as this bring out the hidden ugliness towards others like no other, so it shouldn't be much of a surprise that Jews had a target on their backs. Mobs would find and kill them. They also took other medieval routes such as burning at the stake (Britannica). My people were once again

killed for the sole reason that there is an absence of someone to blame. This was not taught in school. Widespread education has a knack for skipping the uglier parts of narratives, the parts that make humans (especially white ones) not seem so awful. The erasure and beautification of so many people's pain is a direct result of white power throughout the ages. White Americans fought to be able to own slaves, and are now fighting to keep critical race theory out of schools.

“Noma” in the Holocaust

During the Holocaust, if you weren't a Jew you would be treated somewhat “lightly.” This was the case for the Romani people, who were considered threatening because of their free nature. Rather than forcing them to work, using corporal punishment on them, or executing them, the Nazis decided to give Romanis an isolated camp just for themselves. About 15,000 people. They seemed to fall more ill despite their so-called easy treatment. Tadeusz Szymański, a doctor/prisoner positioned there, recalled a strange illness in these people. Szymański hypothesized that since Romanis tend to be nomadic, keeping that type of person trapped is exceptionally bad for their physical health. They even had to open a typhus ward, before Block 22. Block 22 was a special hospital ward made out of vacant barracks. Joseph Mengele, who was appointed head of the Romani isolation camp hospital in the Autumn of 1943, decided to split the Block into three sections for his experiments (Szymański).

- I. Scabies. *Burrowing mites that cause extreme itchiness. Very contagious.*
- II. Cachexia. *Extreme weight loss from muscle/fat reserves. Caused by extreme illness/malnutrition.*
- III. Noma. *A rotting disease.*

It was while working in Block 22 that Szymański saw Noma in real life for the first time. He had read about this disease in medical books, how it mostly happened in children aged two to

six, and most often in east Asia. In places where high populations of people with little access to substantial amounts of food live. He read about a Vietnamese doctor who saw cases at home and called it “cam t u ma” or that it “bites like a galloping horse that champs at the bit.”

Szymański describes the development of Noma in detail. First, a person's mouth would become inflamed and develop a smell. After that, they would develop inner mouth sores. It then would start to reach the outside of the mouth. This began with blue-tinted skin drooping from the cheeks, and teeth and gums began to rot too. Lastly, the hole on the outside of their cheeks would open and begin to spread rapidly. To treat it, the doctors would give patients Cibazol, Prontosil, or vitamin C. Szymański remembers other doctors rubbing a paste on the children's cheeks as well, which he guessed to contain some combination of the former treatments. Mengele would occasionally order for the suffering people to be fed with good, nutritious food instead of the measly rations most prisoners were given. Most of the affected were children and most of them died (Szymański).

This never happened to the Jewish people, though. According to Szymański, who worked in all the different camps' hospitals, he had never witnessed a single case of Noma until the Romani camp. The only Jewish person in this story is a man named Vladimir Zlamal. A name only mentioned in the correct context in one site on one article on the internet. Zlamal is described by Szymański to have painted watercolor portraits of the Noma patients when Mengele occasionally sent them out to his block in Auschwitz (Szymański). Other artists who survived the Holocaust, such as Annemarie Dina Babbitt, have surviving legacies. However, not one picture of these portraits could be located. As far as we know, they were all burned.

Jews seem to avoid having Necrosis, while still being immensely affected by it. Creating artwork about it. Being killed because of it. Having the blame shouldered for it. Mobs chase after

them through the streets of medieval England because they are the “other.” Therefore it must be the Jews fault. Jews are a threat to the world’s safety, so they must be exterminated and experimented on. They receive the worst treatment, but are commissioned to paint the trapped Romani’s rotting faces.

AIDS and Necrosis

Avascular necrosis is a complication found in approximately .34% of all AIDS cases. 22 in 6,487 people. This is enough for doctors to be recommended to look out for AIDS in people with unexplained avascular necrosis and to look out for the necrosis when people with AIDS complain of joint pain (Mehta). The active disease of AIDS is caused by the HIV virus. HIV transmits itself through bodily fluids. Major risk behaviors that could lead to contracting HIV are unsafe sex and intravenous drug usage such as heroin. Members of the LGBTQ+ community tend to be more at risk of contracting it. Particularly men who have sex with men. In 2018 there were 37,948 new HIV diagnoses, and 81% of those people diagnosed with HIV were men. 86% of those people were gay men (HIV and Men). That means about 90 of those gay men now have necrosis of their joints. Around 6,700 women were diagnosed with HIV in 2018 (HIV and Women). There would be about 23 out of those 6,700 with necrosis.

Homophobia is a barrier to the end of the AIDS crisis. The end of necrosis for a lot of people. Queer people are generally blamed for the entire crisis when in the first place homophobia left a majority of us in the dark about safe sex practices and ostracized us. Isolation leads to feelings of depression. Depression can lead to unsafe choices and substance abuse. Yet the queers were blamed and made to look like spreaders of disease- falling right into the sexually deviant and predatory stereotype that society has decided to label this community with. The homophobia that concurred with the AIDS crisis was extremely violent and often violated human rights

(Homophobia). This is what brought up the discussion about gay people being able to donate blood, and created a large amount of fear in the community in the 70s and 80s. Fear of the disease, and fear of going out to get treated. Denial. So many people still do not get the treatment they need on time because of the fear of the reaction against them (Homophobia). Today the HIV/AIDS crisis is considered an epidemic but only to impoverished communities and the LGBTQ+ community. People who have less access to treatment and have to deal with more unsanitary situations, yet are still blamed. Notice a theme?

Group Necrosis: the Spread of a Mindset

An MIT study found that in some people the act of thinking about oneself happens at a much lesser level when they operate as part of a group. They tested this by tracking the activity in the part of the brain used to think about yourself on people doing activities as a group and alone. The researchers don't know why some people are more inclined than others to do this, but they do know that it leads to acting in immoral ways. One of the MIT researchers, Mina Cikara, remembers going to a Yankees game with a Red Socks cap on casually. She got verbally harassed by male Yankees fans like she had never experienced in her entire life. It lasted past the game to going out on the town that night and the weekend. This intrigued her. This spurred the research and they found that people can feel more anonymous or feel like they are unlikely to get caught in a group (Massachusetts). Being part of a group can make a person lose touch with their feelings. Group leaders also generally reframe harmful actions for the greater good. Some people are more susceptible to this kind of propaganda.

Another study from Penn found that boundaries on groups lead to more knowledge being shared, but in turn creates a bigger bias. Identity similarities bring groups together faster and help connections to form. In the study, they suggest that the best way to pass down information (control)

to people is to make sure they are all similar. That way they will all bounce the information off of each other. People with nothing alike won't have anything tying each other together and have biases against each other, so, therefore, connection building will be difficult.

Imagine a group of about thirty people. Everyone has at least one thing in common. However, some people are more drawn to others. People talk. When something happens everyone knows. The talk bounces and bounces until everyone is angry and completely set on their own opinions. Every time there's an argument, a falling out, or someone hurts someone else there is a deceive split between the opinions. It feels like the state of politics in the U.S. and a mental hospital at the same time. Even trying to remain unpolarized, you find it difficult here. There is always one side to be on, black and white. Group boundaries lead to acting in ways that one would normally consider immoral. Hurting people in ways you wouldn't if not acting as a group. Rotting as a group because of the one sidedness and stress that inherently comes with.

If you are near someone who is rotting, chances are that their rot will inspire one of your own. My *Abba* told me once that we are made of the 5 people closest to us. People tend to suffer together. Spread ideas to each other. Reaffirm each other's ways of thinking just to avoid confronting the truth of the harm you are doing.

My Goodbye

People who face any form of necrosis are extremely ill. Ill in any way. Disease of the mind, soul, or body. People who have been trapped from traveling the lands of their home. Populations who are used to freedom. Necrosis causes issues for the people surrounding it. It grows into the people it surrounds. The smell, the blame. Jewish people were blamed during the Black Death, just like all the gay men shunned during the AIDS crisis. Children are malnourished enough to the point their faces cannot hold themselves together anymore. In Vietnam, and inside the Romani

isolation camps. The psychological effects of these diseases continue to haunt us today. Stories spread through groups that imbue us with knowledge from the past. We bounce the opinions we take from the internet around until there's no meaning besides political correctness left. Subscribing to the information spoon-fed to us is not the way to escape rot. It's breaking away from it. The pressure of the daily world and the complexity of morality is what leads us into situations where necrosis begins. Whether it be necrosis within your soul, within your community, or literal cells in your body dying and rotting out it all starts from harmful yet incredibly human behaviors. To be human in this world is to rot in some way. Moving through life is dying. The rot of all things can be cut down on, but never completely ceased in this system of being.

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