



Shalom Auslander's short-story collection Beware of God and his memoir Foreskin's Lament are published by Picador.

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At the bar with the Hate Camel

Shalom Auslander

"Once a year I go to dance clubs to fill up my hump of hate. I'm the Hate Camel, don't you know." Bill Hicks

Fuck Love. Seriously. Fuck it. I love my wife, and I love my son, and I love Maltesers, but Love has been getting a free ride for too damn long while Anger gets the short end of the stick. Love can do no wrong. Love is a many-splendoured thing. Love is a gift to oneself. Love is the poetry of the senses. Everyone wants to deepen their love and get rid of their anger, to discover the love around them and to move past the anger within them. As Aristophanes famously wrote, "Fuck that."

Fact 1: I have never heard of anyone murdering his wife because of her involvement in an "anger triangle".

Fact 2: Anger literature beats the shit out of love literature.

Anger gets a bad rap. The majority of titles in the Self-Help section in my local bookstore are concerned with getting rid of anger; the rest of the titles are concerned with getting a hard-on, which tells me that most people are angry because they can't get a hard-on, which is sad, or they can't get a hard-on because

they're angry, which is sadder. Either way, there are a lot of titles encouraging erections and none encouraging anger, which is infuriating. Because there's bad anger and good anger, and they often get confused.

"So God said to Noah, 'I am going to put an end to all people... I am surely going to destroy both them and the earth.'"

That's bad anger.

"I smoke," said Bill Hicks. "If this bothers anyone, I suggest you look around at the world in which we live and shut your fucking mouth."

That's good anger.

"And in those days shall men seek death, and shall not find it," sayeth the Revelations, "and shall desire to die, and death shall flee from them."

Bad anger.

"Dear Mrs, Mr, Miss, or Mr And Mrs Daneeka," wrote Joseph Heller in *Catch-22*, "words cannot express the deep personal grief I experienced when your husband, son, father, or brother was killed, wounded, or reported missing in action."

Good anger.

Bad anger is destructive, good anger is constructive. Bad anger is humourless and violent, good anger is funny and self-aware. Bad anger targets people. Good anger targets ideas. Bad anger says life sucks because of the Jews; good anger says life sucks, period – that the day after you kill the last Jew will suck as much as the day before (except for the Jews, who are lucky enough to be dead, so joke's on you, asshole).

Bad anger is all around us. It is in mosques and churches and synagogues and just about every book ever written that purports to be holy. It's on right-wing talk radio and left-wing blogs.

Good anger is Joseph Heller, *Candide*, Beckett, *Death on the Installment Plan*, *Breakfast of Champions*, Flannery O'Connor, Ivan Brunetti and Richard Pryor. Good anger is hard to find.

And so, as the rest of the world is running around trying to figure out how to get rid of their anger, I'm running around trying to figure out how to preserve mine. Which is why I so often threaten to kill my shrink.

When I first began therapy, I did so for my wife; I was full of bad rage, taking it out on myself (those were the bad days) and on her (those were the worse days). I went to the psychiatrist's office, sat down on his couch, told him why I was there, and threatened to kill him if he took away my anger.

"I'm not kidding," I said. "I'll fucking kill you."

I was concerned that in an effort to make me healthy, he would inadvertently make me unangry, and extinguish the fire I had within me, a fire that threatened to consume me but which, paradoxically, sustained me.

He assured me that he would never do that – that to take away my anger would be to take away my survival mechanism. His professional opinion was that it wasn't so much a question of ridding me of anger, but of turning destructive (bad) anger into a (good) constructive anger.

"OK," I said. "But if I come back here in a year and I'm not angry..."

"You'll have to kill me," he said.

"I won't want to. But that is my policy."

It's been a difficult fifteen years. It would have been easier to find someone who would tell me I need to get rid of my anger, encourage me to get over it, help me to move on. It would have been easier to go to the local bookstore, buy some self-help books, and hurry home to enjoy my shiny new non-anger and my shiny new Love and my shiny new hard-on.

But where would we be if Beckett had bought *The Anger Busting Workbook*? If Vonnegut had bought *The Anger Habit Workbook*? If Flannery O'Connor had bought *The Anger Workbook for Christians*?

Enough with the love for Love. Enough with the anger towards Anger. Love gets you Nora Roberts and Harlequin Romances; Anger gets you *Slaughterhouse Five* and Lenny Bruce. Love gets you Kenny G and Celine Dion; Anger gets you Tool and System of a Down.

So go ahead, if you want to. Go *Get the Love You Want*, and *Keep the Love You Find*, and *Deepen the Love You Have*.

I'll be over at the bar with Lenny, Kurt and Beckett. Sammy's buying. And he's in a wonderfully lousy mood.

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