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## Just because the bloggers are tapping away like laptop Mozarts doesn't mean they've got anything to say

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Some mornings I like to take my laptop and go and write in the local coffee shop near my office because I have low self-esteem and imagine that people will admire me from afar. And they do. I live in a village in upstate New York that prides itself on being a "community of the arts". Writers, artists, musicians - these are just some of the people who don't actually live here. The houses cost far too much, the food's overpriced and the taxes are criminal. But lots of people who want to be artists, writers and musicians live here, and lots of people who don't want to be artists, writers and musicians but who would like to be around artists, writers and musicians live here as well.

An elderly woman at a table across the way smiles at me. "You are a thoughtful person," she seems to say.

A man in a suit and tie looks guiltily into his latte. "I am not as profound as you," he figures.

An attractive young woman catches my eye and quickly looks away. "You're the type of sensitive man with whom I would like to have sex," she thinks.

A few weeks ago, a man I had never seen before sat down at the table beside me, took out his Mac laptop, and began to type. There have been other people with laptops here before, but this was different. It wasn't just the laptop. It was the typing. He was attacking his keyboard. His fingers pounded the plastic buttons, his long hair fell over his face, his back hunched. It was like watching Mozart at his piano - if Mozart actually played piano, which I didn't know and felt ashamed about. So loud was the sound of his fingers hitting the keys that people at the other end of the cafe turned to watch him in humbled admiration. This was fury. This was passion. This was fire. I wanted to kill him.

I've always been a competitive person. Even as an ultra-Orthodox yeshiva student, I tried to make my prayers last longer than everyone else's. I stood in the synagogue and rocked back and forth, peeking through my closed eyes to see if anyone else was still praying. "Jesus Christ," I thought, "when the hell is Zalman going to be finished?"

Mac Mozart returned the following day, and again the day after that, and each day the typing began, as it had the day before, in furious earnest. Tak-tak tak-tak-tak! Tak-tak! Tak-tak-tak! I wondered what he could be writing. It must have been genius. It must have been powerful and dark and passionate. Why can't I be that passionate, I wondered? Not just about writing, but about anything? What was wrong with me?

I wanted to study his tortured works. I wanted to look inside his heavy soul. I wanted to bite his fingers off. I glanced over at his screen. I couldn't see what he was writing, but it looked like poetry - no fiction-like blocks of words, just individual lines of various uneven lengths. I was relieved for a moment - "Sure, yes, poetry gets written in fiery bursts, of course, not prose ..." But then I soon began to wonder if maybe I should be writing poetry instead of prose. What was wrong with me, wasting time on prose? Stupid prose.

He looked up, rubbed his weary eyes and stretched his tired arms, and I watched as he stood up and headed towards the restroom. Everyone watched him go, as if Samuel Beckett himself had just walked by. "I can't go on, I'll go on." Big deal. So go on, then. Just shut up about it.

I couldn't take it any longer. I waited until the restroom door closed behind him, and pretended to drop my pen beneath his table. I reached over, picked up my pen and looked at his computer.

It wasn't poetry. It wasn't even prose. He was online, posting comments on a left-wing political blog.

"WTF?" he had typed. "Bushy McChimp wants to go to WAR with IRAN and WE'RE TALKING

ABOUT GUN LAWS!!!! FTS!!! NFW!!!! OMG!!!"

I may have missed a few exclamation points there.

"How's it going?" I asked with a smile when he returned.

Mac Mozart ignored me, sat back down behind his computer, ran an exasperated hand through his genius hair, and started typing again. It was only 10am, and he had a long day of pointless online bitching ahead of him. I held my chin in my hand and stared thoughtfully, as writers do, out of the cafe window. Tomorrow, I decided, I'll go to the coffee shop down the road. The one without internet access.

• One of the most personally distressing developments of the current American presidential campaign has been the near-daily use of the phrase "throw under the bus". Barack Obama was accused of throwing his pastor under the bus. John McCain was accused of throwing his economics advisor under the bus. Hillary Clinton was accused of throwing Al Gore under the bus. As someone who spends a large portion of his day graphically imagining throwing people under buses - the surprised look on their faces, the squeal of the bus brakes, the scream of a passerby - I truly wish this would stop. Imagining throwing people under buses is one of the only ways I get through the day without actually throwing people under buses.

The violent homeless man who shouts obscenities at me? Shove. The arrogant CEO on his cellphone walking along as if the sidewalk belonged to him?

Shove. Mom? Shove. I know I shouldn't let these people bother me, and that I'd be a happier person if I didn't, but over time, I've accepted that I'm angry. I've accepted that I'm somewhat negative. I've accepted that I have a propensity for imagined ultra-violence. But now I just feel like ... a politician.

• Marcel Berlins is away.

• This week Shalom read **Ulysses by James Joyce**, "whom I would very much like to throw under a bus". Shalom saw a local production of **Chekhov's Uncle Vanya**: "They somehow turned it into a message about global warming; next week - Brecht's Caucasian Overpopulation Circle."

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