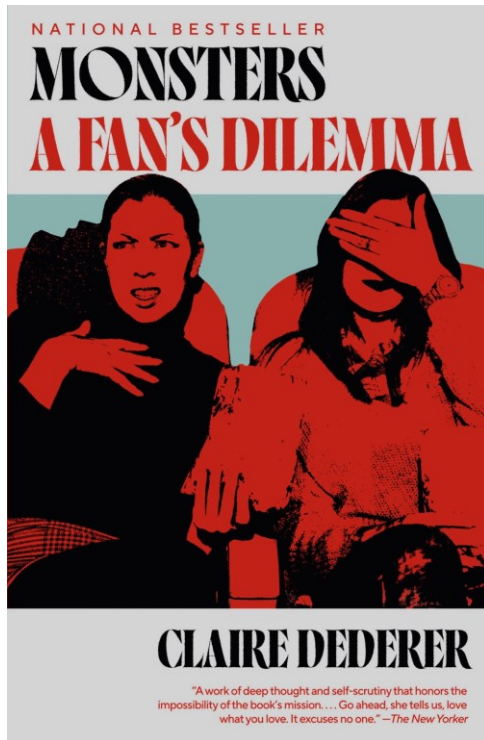


# MONSTERS: A FAN'S DILEMMA



## Book Summary:

The author seeks to answer the question of whether one can separate their feelings about an individual from said individual's works.

## Summary of Concerns:

This book contains child molestation and sexual assault; references to sexual activities; violence; profanity and derogatory terms; controversial political, religious, and social commentary; alternate gender ideologies; alternate sexualities; references to alcohol use, drug use, abortion, and suicide; references to hate including antisemitism and racism.

*Adult*

**By Claire Dederer**

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## CONTENT WARNING

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**3** /5

**Minor Restricted**  
BookLooks Review Rating

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9	On March 10, 1977—I recite these details from memory—Roman Polanski brought Samantha Gailey to his friend Jack Nicholson’s house in the Hollywood Hills. He urged her into the Jacuzzi, encouraged her to strip, gave her a Quaalude, followed her to where she sat on a couch, penetrated her, shifted his position, penetrated her anally, ejaculated. All of these details piled up, but I was left with a simple fact: anal rape of a thirteen-year-old.
11	That forgiveness never happened, even though I understood the circumstances and the context: sex between grown men and teenage girls was normalized at the time, the subject matter of songs and films; Gailey has said she forgives him; Polanski himself was a victim, his mother murdered at Auschwitz, his father held in concentration camps, his wife and unborn child murdered by the Manson Family.
14	No, that wasn’t what I wanted exactly. I’d spent my life being disappointed by beloved male artists: John Lennon beat his wife; T. S. Eliot was an anti-Semite; Lou Reed has been accused of abuse, racism, and anti-Semitism (these offenses are so unimaginative, aside from everything else).
15	A friend who was gang-raped in high school says that any and all work by artists who’ve exploited and abused women should be destroyed. A gay friend whose adolescence was redeemed by art says that art and artist must be separated entirely.
16	This tightening noose of male control is recognizable to any woman who’s ever felt herself reduced to the role of mother and subtly encouraged to ignore her own feelings or intuition—in other words, it’s a very ordinary experience here made menacing and extraordinary.
17	Once the women leave, though, Rosemary is subsumed back into the web of patriarchy, and her fate is sealed. It’s a startlingly feminist vision from a man whose biography seems to pit him against feminism.
21	I drank coffee and ate buttered toast and watched as the Republican presidential candidate talked about grabbing women by the pussy. ...Grab ’em by the pussy. You can do anything. ...But Oxford tweeted this out: “Women: tweet me your first assaults. They aren’t just stats. I’ll go first: Old man on city bus grabs my ‘pussy’ and smiles at me, I’m 12.”
22	All these women sorta rubbed their eyes and looked around and said, “Hunh. What she just called assault is what happened to me.” A rock had been turned over and revealed a bunch of sex pests, scuttling around in the newly bright light. ...Surely this was just a glitch, a campaign-ending unforced error. Surely Hillary Clinton would be elected and everything would return to normal. It was just newly dawning on me that normal was not so good, anyway; that what the election of Hillary Clinton would mean was a continuation of a reality that was growing more unforgiving for everyone; that liberalism was a failed plan for protecting ourselves from ourselves. ...The Trumpian static turned out to be, in fact, our new reality. The demoralizing and sick-making effect of the tape only increased over the next month as it became clear that it would have absolutely zero effect on Trump’s viability as a candidate.
30	It was a cultural version of Gillian Flynn’s famous “cool girl” passage from the novel <i>Gone Girl</i> : “Men always say that as the defining compliment, don’t they? She’s a cool girl. Being the Cool Girl means I am a hot, brilliant, funny woman who adores football, poker, dirty jokes, and burping, who plays video games, drinks cheap beer, loves threesomes and anal sex.”

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32	<p>It grew, initially, out of my status as a woman and a feminist. As I said, I felt personally affronted on that score. But my rage was casting its net wider; on wobbly-faun legs, my rage was going forth and finding new objects: the very systems that allowed inequity to flourish. Trump radicalized the right; what I was experiencing was a radicalization in another direction.</p> <p>...Isaac is fucking that high schooler with what my mother would call a hey-nonny-nonny. Allen is fascinated with moral shading, except when it comes to this particular issue—the issue of middle-aged men having sex with teenage girls.</p> <p>...Isaac makes a few noises about his ambivalence about the relationship: “She’s seventeen. I’m forty-two and she’s seventeen. I’m older than her father, can you believe that? I’m dating a girl, wherein, I can beat up her father.”</p>
33	<p>“In high school, even the ugly girls are beautiful.” A (male) high school teacher once said this to me. (He later mentioned that sometimes he had to go into the bathroom and jerk off because of those high school girls and their high school beauty.)</p> <p>...Allen/ Isaac can get closer to that ideal world, a world that has forgotten its knowledge of death, by having sex with Tracy. Not that she’s a mere sexual object.</p> <p>...“We have great sex.”</p>
35	<p>The most telling moment in the film is a throwaway line delivered in a high whine by a chic woman at a cocktail party: “I finally had an orgasm and my doctor told me it was the wrong kind.” Isaac’s (very funny) response: “Did you have the wrong kind? Really? I’ve never had the wrong kind, ever. My worst one was”—he wags his finger—“right on the money.”</p> <p>...If a woman can think, she can’t come; if she can come, she can’t think.</p>
36	<p>I mentioned this difficulty on social media, this problem of watching Manhattan in the Trump moment. (I fervently hoped it was a moment.) “Manhattan is a work of genius! I am done with you, Claire!” responded a writer (older, white, male) I didn’t know personally. This was a person who had remained silent in the face of many of my more outrageous social media pronouncements, some of which involved my desire to chop up the male half of the species, Valerie Solanas–like.</p>
37	<p>Jodi Kantor and Megan Twohey broke the Weinstein story—a story of ongoing, systemic, repercussion-free abuse. For some reason this was the story that turned the tide. The Me Too movement had been in existence for a decade previously, founded by the Black activist Tarana Burke as a support system (largely off-line, compared to what was to come) for women who’d been through assault and sexual discrimination.</p>
38	<p>Even the patriarchs were sick of patriarchy.</p> <p>...This writer was one of those men of letters who like to play the part, ironically but not—ties and blazers and low-key misogyny and brown alcohol in a tumbler.</p>
45	<p>As I understood it, there were two ways of being: you could be a feminist who called men monsters, or you could ignore the problem.</p> <p>...My feminism, which was in essence a liberal ideology, was coming into conflict with my increasingly leftist politics, my growing desire to look at a bigger picture of where and how material power coalesces.</p>
49	<p>Strange idiosyncratic personal rules arise from such knowledge—I personally have a much easier time watching films that Polanski made before he raped Samantha Gailey. And yet, at the same time, Polanski—predator, rapist—collapses into Polanski, preternaturally talented Polish art student, wunderkind, Holocaust survivor.</p>

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	...We tell ourselves: MJ's crime grew out of his exploitative childhood; Polanski's crime grew out of his survival of the Holocaust and the grisly murder of his wife; R. Kelly's crime grew out of his own (probable) childhood sexual abuse.
53	Everything is everyone's business—there's a market for every piece of information, just as (not coincidentally) there's a market for every kind of porn.
61	Harry Potter fan-ship twined with the growth of the Tumblr platform, which in turn twined with the growth of a new kind of LGBTQ + movement... kids who found solace in un-embodied community, whether it was Hogwarts or online.
62	(One of the brothers went on to join the queer communist hardcore band Downtown Boys, which makes perfect sense on further reflection—Harry Potter culture was, in many ways, about stickin' it to the man.) ...In 2021, J. K. Rowling began to signal that she was aligned with the growing “gender identity” movement in England. Rowling argued that gender was determined by sexual organs, and moreover that denying this truth endangered the lives of girls and women. Rowling wrote a statement on her website worrying about “ ‘inclusive’ language that calls female people ‘menstruators’ and ‘people with vulvas.’ ” She argued: “I want trans women to be safe. At the same time, I do not want to make natal girls and women less safe. When you throw open the doors of bathrooms and changing rooms to any man who believes or feels he's a woman—and, as I've said, gender confirmation certificates may now be granted without any need for surgery or hormones—then you open the door to any and all men who wish to come inside.” ...Many of the former Potter kids were trans and they were rightly very angry.
63	If you are a trans person, or love a trans person, or simply disagree with Rowling's language, what then to do with that part of your childhood that had become intertwined with Harry Potter?
74	When asked about this at a press conference, Monty Python's Terry Gilliam responded, “Frankly, as a white male, I'm tired of being blamed for everything that is wrong in the world. From now on, I would like you to call me Loretta. I'm a black lesbian in transition... a BLT.”
75	A Black friend recently got up from the table in the midst of a conversation about monstrous artists, saying simply, “What do I care? When I was a kid, I never read anything about myself. I never saw myself. I spent my whole childhood being asked to read books where there were no Black people.”
76	It's a painfully limited perspective to say straight white men shouldn't be heard from; it's also painfully limited for those white men to skip the part where they learn that their feelings, too, are tied up with history.
77	I have been a teenager predated by older men; I have been molested; I've been assaulted on the street; I've been grabbed and I've been coerced and I've escaped from attempted rape.
79	Mattix didn't begrudge Bowie her virginity; in fact, she spoke of the incident in rhapsodic language: “I was an innocent girl, but the way it happened was so beautiful. I remember him looking like God and having me over a table. Who wouldn't want to lose their virginity to David Bowie?” (“ I remember him looking like God” sounds like a David Bowie line.) ...Sure, Led Zeppelin and Mötley Crüe and Aerosmith—fine, go ahead and have sex with teens.
80	PWR BTTM comprised just two people, a man (who now identifies as nonbinary) and a trans woman, who presented themselves as unabashedly queer. In fact, they called themselves

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	<p>queercore—and consequently developed a rabid following of LGBTQ teenagers, their straight allies, and all-purpose teenage weirdos across the country.</p> <p>...Just days before the release date, one half of the band was accused of initiating unwanted sexual contact with young female fans.</p>
94	<p>It depends on the idea that everyone knows Picasso was a womanizing powerhouse.</p>
95	<p>Picasso's granddaughter Marina wrote in her memoir: "He submitted them to his animal sexuality, tamed them, bewitched them, ingested them, and crushed them onto his canvas. After he had spent many nights extracting their essence, once they were bled dry, he would dispose of them."</p> <p>It's no crime to love a lot of women—even if it makes the women in question cross or jealous or crazy or suicidal. But of course Picasso was also abusive toward these women (beatings and burnings), and moreover he was a predator of young girls, who fascinated him and whom he used as models.</p>
96	<p>Gauguin, who abandoned his wife and children to flee to Tahiti, where he didn't know the language or the religion or the customs, none of which prevented him from sleeping with young Tahitian girls, an act of sexual colonization that he himself was only too happy to mythologize.</p>
97	<p>Picasso's masculinity colors every part of our viewing. You could argue that his masculinity justifies his effete interest in experimentation, even in beauty. Picasso is the man who had sex with two separate women on the same day, and painted them both. The sex is as important as the painting.</p> <p>...From Arianna Huffington's madly dramatic book, <i>Picasso: Creator and Destroyer</i>:  "Everything, the whole of creation, was an enemy, and he was a painter in order to fashion not works of art—he despised that term—but weapons: defensive weapons against the spell of the spirit that fills creation, and offensive weapons against everything outside man, against every emotion of belonging in creation, against nature, human nature, and the God who created it all. 'Obviously,' he said, 'nature has to exist so that we may rape it!'"</p>
100	<p>Hemingway lived his life as an alcoholic and killed himself, just as his father did; this destructive legacy was passed down and seemed not to become diluted: his child, born Gregory, sometimes known as Gloria, died in a Florida jail cell; his granddaughter Margot/Margaux Hemingway drank herself into a deep depression and eventually killed herself.</p> <p>...A <i>Moveable Feast</i> is full of hilarious and cruel takedowns of his fellow writers, including a description of overhearing his good friends Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas having sex, after which he claims to have severed his friendship with the two women, so traumatized was he by the sounds emitted from behind the closed door.</p>
101	<p>The fucking, the hardness, the cruelty, the masculinity, the brutishness shaped the image, and, following on from there, our idea of what a genius really is.</p> <p>...The <i>Sun Also Rises</i> is full of jokes. (It's also full of anti-Semitism.) A very small aside—my leftist kids make the joke "direct action" all the time.</p> <p>...Two characters are sitting around drinking, and one pours them both some rum punch—instead of thanking him, the other character says, "Direct action. It beats legislation."</p>
102	<p>Hemingway's particular stain was a kind of brutish, careless masculinity; this was the image that accompanied him.</p>

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103	After all, in his early childhood his mother often dressed him as a girl. ...Over the following decades a more thoughtful reappraisal allowed the book's theme of gender fluidity to infect and influence thinking about Hemingway.
104	The essayist John Jeremiah Sullivan spoke in an interview in a jolly way about Hemingway's torments: "Recently I got sucked into a research project in northern Michigan, and it led me to reread Hemingway for the first time since college. It was fun. All these recent biographical attacks have made him interesting again. He was, as we know, fantastically tormented about sex, and gender, and his own masculinity. If you had asked me about him 20 years ago, I would have said what I'd been taught to say: 'It's about the work.' Which—and I've learned this—is what people say when there's something they want to avoid. The something is, with a freakish regularity, sexual."
108	Rock stars enacted an escalating ideal of freedom, from Elvis gyrating his hips to Jim Morrison pulling his dick out onstage (which I always picture him doing with a puzzled look on his face: "What's this, then?").
109	This is the key image of rock star freedom- the idea that you can be barefoot and filthy and worth millions. Kanye goes on: "Rock stars can pull their dick out in public then go rock 20,000 people. Rock stars have a wife and kids...Rock stars can give their fucking opinion without having to deal with every day of my life? Oh, yea. Backlash."
114	One cold winter night at the end of 2017, I gathered with a bunch of women from my island to drink bourbon and watch the moon rise over the water. I was trying to warm myself by jumping up and down on the rocky ground in a pair of clogs while drinking bourbon, a potentially disastrous move. A woman I didn't know well said—predictably—that we should try meeting the Trumpists with open hearts. Maybe we had something to learn about white working-class anomie... you don't need me to go into the details. I'm sure you had many such conversations as you made your own away across the wasteland. I was already very weary of this kind of argument—especially because I had a growing sense that looking toward the middle wasn't going to solve anything. ..."Why?" she said. "They don't want to understand me. They want to hurt me. It's always been like this for Jews. I'm afraid to go to the synagogue. And it's not like that fear is a new thing. It's the same old thing."
115	When Dave Meinert—a bar owner entrenched in the Seattle music scene—was accused of rape in the wake of #MeToo, the response was exactly this.
116	When we read or consume works from the Past, we discover a world filled with garden-variety assholes: wife beaters, child abusers, racists.
119	Writes Wagner, "The Jew—who, as everyone knows, has a God all to himself—in ordinary life strikes us primarily by his outward appearance, which, no matter to what European nationality we belong, has something disagreeably foreign to that nationality: instinctively we wish to have nothing in common with a man who looks like that."
121	Just as the racists who voted for Trump think that "we" are all filled with a like-minded racism, if only we'd just admit it.
124	The director here interjects an apt quotation from Walter Benjamin—" Thus fascism aestheticizes politics and communism answers with the politicizing of art"—clearly indicting Wagner and his family as instruments of fascism. The politicization Winifred decries is a response, an "answer," to that fascism. But of course Winifred doesn't see her role at Bayreuth as an aestheticization of politics—like



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	a good fascist, she believes she and her kind are the ones who are free of politics, free of “fuss.”
127	And in Little Town on the Prairie, we get the appearance of a gang of white folks in blackface. As a child, I loved Little House on the Prairie. I read and reread the books until they were as known to me as my own history—maybe more so. I pretended I was Laura. I owned a sunbonnet. The freedom I dreamed of was white freedom. Of course I didn’t see it that way. But the racism was part of the project; the project of making more freedom for white people. It’s not accidental that it was there; it was part of the deal.
132	When the Tree of Life shootings took place in Pittsburgh in October of that year, the general sentiment was surprise that something this terrible hadn’t happened sooner in the Trump presidency. ...The rabbi said: Before the world was made, God was complete and whole. If that’s the case, then there was no space for something new to be made. So he blew himself up and out of the broken bits came the world.
136	I was interested to see old HH set age parameters for nymphet-hood: “I would have the reader see ‘nine’ and ‘fourteen’ as the boundaries—the mirry beaches and rosy rocks—of an enchanted island haunted by those nymphets of mine and surrounded by a vast, misty sea.” (A landscape that recalls the utopian/ menacing little-girl-world of Henry Darger.) By the metric of age, I myself was a nymphet—though it seemed there was more to it than that. There were, I found, requisites of nymphet-dom not visible to everyone: what Nabokov called “ineffable signs—the slightly feline outline of a cheekbone, the slenderness of a downy limb, and other indices which despair and shame and tears of tenderness forbid me to tabulate.”
138	From his early Russian work The Enchanter all the way through his posthumous novel, The Original of Laura, Nabokov shows us men having sex with very young girls, or trying to have sex with very young girls, or trying (not very hard) not to have sex with very young girls. Yet there is no evidence at all that Nabokov himself was a pedophile in his inmost heart.
139	Could Lolita be published today? I doubt it. The story of a serial predator who grooms a young girl, abducts her, takes her on a cross-country road trip, rapes her every night and in the mornings too, and prevents her escape at every turn? And we only get his point of view? It’s impossible to know whether or not the book would be published now, but it’s easy to imagine an outraged reception.
140	Maybe the answer can be found in the words of another asshole, Roman Polanski. In the klieg-light aftermath of his rape of thirteen-year-old Samantha Gailey, he said his desire to have sex with young girls was the most ordinary thing in the world. “I realise, if I have killed somebody, it wouldn’t have had so much appeal to the press you see? But... fucking, you see, and the young girls. Judges want to fuck young girls. Juries want to fuck young girls—everyone wants to fuck young girls!” Polanski, of all people, has given us a piece of wisdom here: the desire to rape children is not so unusual.
143	After the first time he rapes her, she herself names it as an ordinary crime: “ ‘You chump,’ she said, sweetly smiling at me. ‘You revolting creature. I was a daisy-fresh girl, and look what you’ve done to me. I ought to call the police and tell them you raped me. Oh you dirty, dirty old man.’ ”
144	Everyone wants to fuck young girls.

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147	If Humbert is not special—if he is in fact as ordinary as Frank Lasalle, if everyone wants to fuck young girls, if this is an ordinary crime—then we can think of Lolita as, unwittingly, a member of another, much less lucky group of children.
150	Subject matter has been put on trial—Roth is called a sexist for (among other things) writing sexist men; James Salter’s final book was decried for describing sex between a grown man and a young girl.
154	She had begun to make a name for herself with her overtly feminist work—she created a 1973 piece, Rape Scene, when she was still a student at the University of Iowa. The work was a response to the rape of a fellow student; Mendieta invited viewers to her apartment, where, through a door left ajar, they sighted the artist in the position of the rape victim: bloody, bent over a table, and naked from the waist down.
155	<p>Chambers’s defense attorney intimated that Levin’s desire for “rough sex” was what brought about her murder (a New York Post headline: “Central Park suspect’s lawyer claims ‘Jenny killed in wild sex.’”). Meanwhile down the hall Andre’s defense team “tried to turn Ana into the stereotypical, hot-blooded, drunken Hispanic,” according to one curator who observed the trial.</p> <p>...At the time, the painter Howardeena Pindell gave a précis of what was really going on: “What they did was try to degrade Ana because she’s an artist of color. All that stuff introduced about her being interested in Voodoo, to show the judge she was ‘other’ and dragging out pictures of Ana with Castro in Cuba was an attempt to degrade her. The art world is segregated as it is. I know if Ana had been an Anglo and if Carl had been black, the art world would have lynched him.... Oh, sure, I see it as totally symbolic, your life isn’t worth shit, is that direct enough?”</p>
161	I’ve never promulgated fascism. Am I monster? I didn’t molest a child. Am I a monster? I haven’t been accused by dozens of women of drugging and raping them. Am I a monster? I don’t beat my children. (YET.) Am I a monster? I’m not noted for my anti-Semitism. Am I a monster? I’ve never presided over a sex cult where I trapped young women in a gilded Atlanta mansion and forced them to do my bidding. Am I a monster? I didn’t anally rape a thirteen-year-old.
197	<p>Who cared about a pregnant lady? Not me.</p> <p>When I was young, I saw it, or rather felt it, like this: pregnancy was the very definition of the death of options.</p> <p>...Even to this day, I feel my interest in a story waning if a pregnancy occurs. And I speak as someone who has loved being a mother—in fact, I even liked being pregnant. But as a reader, a pregnancy makes my heart sink. Pregnancy is the end of narrative. All the doors shut at once. Don’t cut yourself off from options! I want to yell at the pregnant characters in these books.</p> <p>If motherhood is the greatest thing that has ever happened to me, in large part that’s because of—not despite—its optional nature. I got to choose.</p>
198	She decided to have the child but give it up for adoption—both abortion and keeping the child were unthinkable.
200	In Girls Like Us, Sheila Weller also gives voice to this point of view, imagining Mitchell’s thought process: “If I give up this unsought baby, then I’m not going to do so for nothing. If I make this serious relinquishment, I will use my reclaimed life to ‘give birth,’ as it were, to something else.” Weller goes on: “Joni herself seems to have believed that the loss of the



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	<p>baby equaled the beginning of the songs.” Mitchell cut off her motherhood to make her career. She separated the self from the art, as many women have had to do—privileging one over the other.</p>
201	<p>She released Blue on Warner Bros., and the in-house ad man, Stan Cornyn, wrote painfully sexist ads for her.</p>
210	<p>He was ready to fight anyone about anything. Menacingly, belligerently, meanly, he said: “I am an optimistic guy. I always try to be on the sunrise side of the mountain.” This was so psychotic and ill-stated that I knew it had to be some kind of Republican secret handshake—and indeed it’s a phrase George W. Bush often used, a phrase that signaled he, like Christ (perhaps you’ve heard of him), would be resurrected. Kavanaugh spat it out.</p>
212	<p>Then, sometime in early 1967, she wrote the book that would change her life: the SCUM Manifesto. “SCUM” stood for Society for Cutting Up Men. The manifesto is a call to rid the planet of men. It opens with this sentence: “Life in this society being, at best, an utter bore and no aspect of society being at all relevant to women, there remains to civic-minded, responsible, thrill-seeking females only to overthrow the government, eliminate the money system, institute complete automation and destroy the male sex.” Get rid of money, work, and men, and you’d have a society fit to live in. As the kids would say, where’s the ...According to Solanas, deep down each man “knows he’s a worthless piece of shit.” In an attempt to compensate for his inadequacy, Solanas’s man dominates the family, the workplace, and, through his war-making, the world. “No genuine social revolution can be accomplished by the male,” she writes, “as the male on top wants the status quo, and all the male on the bottom wants is to be the male on top... The male changes only when forced to do so by technology, when he has no choice, when ‘society’ reaches the stage where he must change or die. We’re at that stage now; if women don’t get their asses in gear fast, we may very well all die.” Again, this sentiment feels more true than ever—this intense knowing that the people in charge have screwed up irrevocably and the rest of us had better get our asses in gear. As you can see, once you start quoting Solanas, it’s hard to stop, largely because she’s so often right. For Solanas, getting our asses in gear means getting rid of the men. Not all women can be trusted with this charge; only SCUM—“hateful, violent bitches given to slamming those who unduly irritate them in the teeth”—are up to the task. The manifesto whipsaws you. One moment you’re nodding along with her rage, the next you’re wondering “How did we end up here?” as she talks about ramming ice picks up assholes.</p>
214	<p>She’s put the phallus inside the vagina, not as a penetration, but as a confused kind of power.</p>
215	<p>In the 1980s, she continued to live a marginal life, nursing a drug problem and supporting herself with sex work. ...SCUM is no longer so scummy. SCUM is transgressive, radical, queer, other-identified. SCUM has its own learned journals, its own university departments, its own bands and movies.</p>
216	<p>(In this way, she makes a kind of strange cousin to the groupie-fucking men of rock, whose offstage and extracurricular behaviors were at least as important as their music.)</p>

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221	<p>Their texts are places free of men and yet defined by men. Places of unfree freedom. They are dreaming worlds free of the violence of men, and their dreams are still proscribed by men, like a perversion of the line from the theorist Mark Fisher: “It is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism.” It is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of patriarchy.</p> <p>...Each of them—in her work—laid bare the violence at the center of the male-controlled world. That is to say, the real world.</p> <p>...At the end of the Kavanaugh confirmation hearings, Democrats made a deal calling for a weeklong FBI investigation of the charges against him. It was clear that this investigation would be meaningless. (Which was perhaps a good reminder to liberals who had started to believe that the FBI was going to in some way prove to be the arm of government that would finally quash Trump. The FBI is not the friend of the powerless.) I was left slack and dismayed. I didn’t know what to do about any of it. I turned off the TV until the next crisis came. I sent money to some abortion rights groups.</p>
225	Carver was a hard drinker, a bad earner, and an abuser of his wife.
226	The same year, he was hospitalized four times for acute alcoholism.
228	He considered this as he sipped the whiskey.
229	The two men share a love of scotch, and the blind man accepts the narrator’s offer of weed.
231	<p>One sunny hungover fall morning, deep in the Trump years, I quit drinking.</p> <p>...For the first time, I admitted to myself that I had binged and blacked out and driven drunk and lied.</p>
233	<p>I loved him most when I was in my twenties, my party-drinking era—when once every year or so, or maybe every financial quarter, I would wake up and wonder if I should be going to AA.</p> <p>...If we believed otherwise, wouldn’t the alcoholic just stay in the gutter, an XXX bottle tipped to her lips like a cartoon drunkard?</p>
235	<p>Drinking and drugging are a shit solution in the long run, but in the short run they are extremely effective strategies for managing Bad Feelings.</p> <p>In a nutshell, addicts are often people who have been badly hurt—sometimes by other people, sometimes by more structural abuses like poverty and racism.</p>
236	<p>The pandemic hit; my children, and then I, took to the streets to protest systemic racism; the university where I teach undertook a reckoning, uncomfortable for many of us, with its own whiteness; our entire coast caught fire; we breathed the atmosphere of the end of the world.</p> <p>...Like many people I knew, I had a growing (correct) sense of my own complicity, my own reliance on the luck of my skin color and my family.</p>
237	<p>Passing the problem on to the consumer is how capitalism works. A series of decisions is made—decisions that are not primarily concerned with ethics—and then the consumer is left to figure out how to respond, how to parse the correct and ethical way to behave.</p> <p>...Given the role we inhabit, it’s natural for us to try to solve injustice and inequity through our individual choices. This feels like a great idea, but unfortunately it doesn’t really work. “The problem is that the model of individual responsibility assumed by most versions of ethics” can have “little purchase on the behavior of Capital or corporations.”</p>
243	Beauty would come to seem less important than ever over the next few years, as hundreds of thousands died, our fellow citizens were routinely killed by the police, and late capitalism exacted its cruelest tithing.

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	...“The beautiful is a social construction. It’s a set of ambient community standards as to what constitutes an appropriate visual configuration. It’s what we’re supposed to like. Beauty is what we like, whether we should or not, what we respond to involuntarily.”
246	My friend Peter, a teenager in the 1980s and closeted (even to himself), methodically made his way through the old films in the Leonard Maltin movie guide, and found—in those Katharine Hepburn and Bette Davis and Elizabeth Taylor movies—something that told him it was okay to be gay.

Profanity/Derogatory Term	Count
Ass	34
Bitch	4
Dick	2
Fuck	20
Goddamn	1
Piss	3
Queer	11
Shit	20