

Pain Is a Chain.
Move, and I'll Hear You

Advance Praise for *Pain Is a Chain. Move, and I'll Hear You*

"Hofstatter confidently steps onto the field, hands twitching and full of wires and grue. Not since I encountered Thom Metzger's *This Is Your Final Warning* have I been so enraptured by the stitching of words and image story. This, my friends, is absolutely astounding!!"

~ John Boden, author of *Thrift Store Puzzles* and
Etiquette Of Booby Traps

"Odd. Dark. Disturbing. Hofstatter's *Pain Is a Chain, Move and I'll Hear You* bleeds and haunts quickly. Once you're in it, you're in it to the dastardly end."

—Christina M. Rau, author of the Elgin Award-winning *Liberating The Astronauts*

"Hofstatter is a prose poet of brutality and elegance. He explores the darkest depths of what we're capable of without flinching."

—Priya Sharma

Conversation Pieces



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Poems by Erik Hofstatter

About the Aqueduct Press Conversation Pieces Series

The feminist engaged with sf is passionately interested in challenging the way things are, passionately determined to understand how everything works. It is my constant sense of our feminist-sf present as a grand conversation that enables me to trace its existence into the past and from there see its trajectory extending into our future. A genealogy for feminist sf would not constitute a chart depicting direct lineages but would offer us an ever-shifting, fluid mosaic, the individual tiles of which we will probably only ever partially access. What could be more in the spirit of feminist sf than to conceptualize a genealogy that explicitly manifests our own communities across not only space but also time?

Aqueduct's small paperback series, Conversation Pieces, aims to both document and facilitate the "grand conversation." The Conversation Pieces series presents a wide variety of texts, including short fiction (which may not always be sf and may not necessarily even be feminist), essays, speeches, manifestoes, poetry, interviews, correspondence, and group discussions. Many of the texts are reprinted material, but some are new. The grand conversation reaches at least as far back as Mary Shelley and extends, in our speculations and visions, into the continually created future. In Jonathan Goldberg's words, "To look forward to the history that will be, one must look at and retell the history that has been told." And that is what Conversation Pieces is all about.

L. Timmel Duchamp

Jonathan Goldberg, "The History That Will Be" in Louise Fradenburg and Carla Freccero, eds., *Premodern Sexualities* (New York and London: Routledge, 1996)

Conversation Pieces
Volume 101

Pain Is a Chain.
Move, and I'll Hear You

by
Erik Hofstatter





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Content warning: potential religious trauma, profanity, blood and mutilation, genocide, war crimes, mutilation, profanity, torture, sexual violence, and strong language.

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Original Block Print of Mary Shelley by Justin Kempton:
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North Sumatra 1965

I found peace in your warm grave—my torture garden.
Sometimes you gotta go without to know what you
really need.

The way you can (re)shape trees with a wire, I did
that with your neck. Wrapped a wire around it. Just so I
could bend you to my heart's template.

They all wanted to be free men.

"I wanna work outside the system."

Note he said *work*, idiot.

Try translating freedom to someone with an extra
chromosome.

Eyes like empty plates. Say the right word, and they'll break.

Everybody breaks. I know that now.

It's easy to confuse financial independence with true
liberty.

"You'll never be free."

You told me that.

You like me fighting down in your love pit.

But that's okay.

I let you have my freedom so you can have more time.

To be free.

Free

to

think

about

me.

Life in style. Relax and Rolex. The two RRs. I won't tell you my name but it ended with—WAR. I always had conflict in me. Maybe that's why they picked me. I was a shape-shifter.

Not the kind you think. Morals shift in all of us. They change when money hits your palm. Then my machete hits your child. Ultimate freedom comes at a price.

But it's a point of view.

Death is freedom too.

Some were too smart for blood. We used words to
shake them up.

Destroy their dignity, watch the fear set in.

Then break them. Like a piggy bank. Get at the
sweet cash inside.

But I don't like words. I'm better with a wire.

"We got this big meeting and need money to
organize it."

And they paid the ghost in my eyes.

Your best-loved possession.

The torment always grows.
If they didn't pay—we killed them.

I wore this dead girl on my back like a parachute.
Jumped from the bridge, pulled on her short arms.
Hoping she would open.
That something would fly out of her mouth.
Corpse words I knew.
But she said nothing.
Silent hearts bully the water. It's theirs now.
We tie parent bodies together, fun little rafts.
And paddle in pursuit of her.

the river is haunted
i think of lung-shaped ponds
there are no fish there
only your belly-up quotes
the Aquarius blood

My heart was always ahead of yours.
But in time—it'll catch up with mine.

The pursuit. In your thoughts. That's where it starts.
With a brave eye I chase you. Then you see me and
your chest rises higher. You offer peaks to melodic
climbers.

The air gets thin when I'm around you. The cold
rolls in to blind you. I'm on top now—and you're
rooted in my sun. You beg me to melt what's about to
be done.

Because at night
I steal Orion's belt
just to spank you.

hate can be taught
when the military overthrew our government
death became a business partner
it's the world's biggest capitalist
there's a killing to be made

When I say death, I mean us.
We re-wrote destinies with reaper's ink.

“You can’t afford me.”
If somebody costs you your peace—they’re too
expensive.
But kill them, and you get it back.
Or so I thought.

Capital gain—that was never you.
You were born to gain hearts.
That's the capital you love to visit.
All my streets are named after you.
That's how I get lost.

You figured it out. The best-selling product was
much closer to home.

Right there, between your legs. Lust is the ultimate
consumer. And men are easy.

Resist a little, and they go crazy.
They want what keeps on escaping.

i
got
skinny
because cortisol
was all you fed me

there's no manual for fixing the world
 gimme a wire, and I'll make you listen
 tune you with it
666 is the devil's channel—
 but he's too young to watch mine

About the Author

Erik Hofstatter is a dark fiction writer, born in the wild lands of the Czech Republic. He roamed Europe before subsequently settling on English shores, studying creative writing at the London School of Journalism. He now dwells in Kent, where he can be encountered consuming copious amounts of mead and tyrannizing local peasantry. His work has appeared in various magazines and podcasts around the world such as *Morpheus Tales*, *The Literary Hatchet*, *Wicked Library*, *Manor House Show*, and *The Black Room Manuscripts* Volume IV. Other works include *The Hurricane Caged Inside of Her*, *Stone Martyrs*, and *Bankrupting Sky Banks*.