

Sex, Drugs, and Schizophrenia

By

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The collected writings of Jonathan Harnisch mark a magnificent contribution to the public understanding of mental illness through a masterpiece of transgressive fiction with a heart. The general reader is finally able to see mainstream literary author Jonathan Harnisch at his best. *Sex, Drugs, and Schizophrenia* contains the works of 2014, *Jonathan Harnisch: An Alibiography* and *Second Alibi: The Banality of Life*, in one complete streaming narrative. The monumental scale of Harnisch's achievement through adversity flourishes and can now be appreciated in this diverse, invaluable, and thought-provoking collection of fragmented fiction which will make your brain spin as Harnisch's sense of the inner machinations within the human experience spring into life through the written word. It forces one to question reality and step into another world wanting the protagonist and his alter ego to get it together and be okay. The author reveals himself through a series of alibis in the day-to-day meetings of multiple personalities, a corner of psychiatry that is hardly understood, and shedding light on the experiences of schizophrenia in a language that the non-sufferer can understand, albeit from the author who suffers himself. Not for the faint of heart, this fictionalized account of a disparate mind triumphs.

Sex, Drugs, and Schizophrenia

SECTION ONE:

Second Alibi: The Banality of Life

Subterranean By Design

Hidden beneath his meticulously cluttered desk covered in piles of books sits a frozen, mysterious, mosaic-eyed man in a tattered brown and yellow plaid suit. His thick salt and pepper hair is shaggy and mussed, his face unshaven and his demeanor disheveled.

Author's Preface

Let's get the facts straight up front, to avoid any confusion later. I am a person first, a human being, just like anyone else. Maybe a little different, that's all. Years ago, I publicly disclosed my diagnoses with comorbid schizoaffective disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, personality disorder NOS (not otherwise specified), and Tourette's syndrome. One might argue that I have been dealt quite a handful of cards and have been put through the wringer. Maybe it's just the luck of the draw, or maybe it's not luck at all. But some time ago, when I felt internally trapped and suffocated and hiding all my inner demons (as I call them) while secretly writing about them, it simply grabbed hold of me, and boy did it grab hold.

I had made seven suicide attempts and had over 30 hospitalizations and addiction rehabilitation stints within a decade. Then, one day, I just made a choice. It felt like the sun smacked my face, allowing my mind, my experiences, and my altered sense of reality to burn, twist, deform, and coil. I am referring to a metamorphosis, which had taken place inside me.

I looked into the mirror and everything came alive—my delusions, my dreams were burying everything within reality as I experienced it. Now, I no longer saw impossibility in the mirror. My imagination ignited once again. I kept staring at my reflection. My delusions of grandeur formed a shape, on their own, in my reflection—in my double reality, if you will (not a multiple personality, which is one of many myths surrounding schizophrenia).

Within the depths of my mind and psyche, my imagination began to dream while awake. In short, the metamorphosis occurring inside caused me to begin my mission, exploiting all that I had kept buried inside for far too long, letting loose all my secret weariness of suffocation of and derailments from the truth, my truth.

I opened up: raw, unabashed, facing perhaps my hugest fear. I went public with my mental health conditions. One morning, I awakened for the day at midnight and was unable to think clearly, concentrate, or remember much of anything. I dove into my art, my work, my life purpose of productivity, but I couldn't concentrate. Growing more and more upset with myself, I felt a very familiar stinging sense of shame and disapproval. My thoughts, my executive function deficit, were askew along with my condition. My morning writing session had gone awry, at least at first.

This happens to be a part of my morning writing session.

My concentration had been thrown off, and an overload of stimuli within the silence of my home office frustrated me. I took a hot shower to ground myself, which often does the trick, and then returned to writing. At this point, the original thesis or subject of my words shifted with my thoughts, and that suited me just fine.

Earlier, I had been overcome, irritated beyond belief —mentally, physically, and perhaps spiritually too—by my role of being an artist, which is commonly known to involve, for example, my latest novel Jonathan Harnisch: An Alibiography, my masterpiece. However, the point to my sitting at my desk began to metamorphose on its own. That's one thing I love about writing and writing therapy—how it helps me. It keeps things simple, and it helps my thinking become clearer.

Being a mainstream literary author is known to be 50 percent writing and 50 percent marketing, and it was the business aspect, the marketing, that ripped at my soul. At least that was how I felt. I felt defeated. While writing therapy is a tool I take quite seriously, perhaps I was not upset with the onslaught of internal difficulties. My own goal of being the best, being on the best seller list—that doesn't matter any longer, and that's not why I write. I write for therapy, and that is why I keep fighting my mental health condition, my mind, every single day, because I can overcome the demons, the delusion, and the distractions.

Perhaps this morning my cognitive behavioral therapist would have reminded me that my mind plays tricks on me, or that we all suffer in some way from cognitive distortions. He would remind me of how cognitive distortions and living with mental illness can take its toll on interpersonal relationships. After all, I believe we are all in the same boat in many ways. And it comes down to something very clichéd, yet entirely true.

We all have problems, but let's not kid ourselves: it's how we deal with them that makes the difference. I ponder on what the difference is. In my question, I see the answer. I see my self-confident smile once again. Relationships with family and friends have faded and deteriorated in my world, and then just the opposite occurs, sometimes at the drop of a hat. I am grateful for living on a mental roller coaster and not a merry-go-round.

My illnesses make me unusual, as I said, and sometimes I think we all just need to give ourselves a time out to be alone for a bit, simply to figure some things out. Usually, we can see a problem in a new way when we focus our eyes some place new. That's what the past hour has taught me. It's good. Good enough.

Realistically, things may not be as bad as they seem. Sometimes another perspective on distressing matters can help. I see it as my task, perhaps our collective task, to be resilient, even if some days we just have to be there for ourselves when we are feeling alone in the enterprise. We move on. There's no way around it. I ask myself now if I feel okay, and the smile is back. Thank goodness.

One last note: I've often doubted my abilities and my perception of my reality by fearing others and feeling myself withdrawing and going inside, losing hope of coming back to myself with any peace of mind. The future, that's not where I am; I'm right here in the now.

Katherine Hepburn once said, "If you obey all of the rules, you miss all of the fun."

I apply that to writing and writing therapy, as well.

Instrumental: Digging Up the Past

Conversation with Self

I woke up and set myself the goal of getting out of bed. I achieved it.

I set my next goal of getting washed and dressed, and I achieved this too.

Next, I successfully went to my first appointment of the day.

Am I afraid?

I was. At first.

Why?

Because I know I am dying, and I'm not finished.

With what?

I don't know.

Then why did you let yourself die?

I didn't know I had a choice.

Did it hurt?

Not in a way you will understand.

Well, what did it feel like then?

It felt like forgetting. Like my life was slowly pouring out of me as I lay there grasping for it with invisible fingers. I watched it fall out of me as if it had never happened. It was that fast, the undoing of it all. And, just like that, it was gone. I was undone. I saw you at age thirty-eight, my same age, and I understood your own forgetting and how difficult it was to keep a life going when there was no body anymore.

I understood my body was going. My arms were numb, my head heavy, my eyelids caked shut. I understood my body was disappearing, and I was afraid for what that meant.

I was afraid of who I'd be without my body. And how would my grandchildren know the sound of my voice? And—oh my God—they wouldn't.

So what did it feel like?

It felt like forgetting. Letting go of the body is an effortless thing, unless you fight for it, and that's what I did. I fought. I fought to bring my body back. But I was too tired. I gave up fighting when I understood.

What did you understand?

That you might forget small details, but that you'd carry on my legacy. And that you and your Mommy and your sister would know that I loved you and did the best I could. And that maybe I was finished. How can anyone really know, anyway?

Did you? Do the best you could?

I don't know. Yes. Maybe. No.

Why is it so hard to do our best?

Because we forget.

[Smoke Break]

Do You Know What You're Getting Into?

A little bit of fun, for example, catching the reading bug, if you haven't been hooked already, can change your life forever and a few minutes could lead to a lifetime of commitment.

"A fragmented debut novel about life lived under a fog of schizophrenia from author Harnisch.

"Benjamin J. Schreiber has a number of problems, not the least of which being that he tried to rob a bank with a cellphone. Mentally ill... Ben finds himself in therapy instead of jail. While in therapy, Ben explores his alter ego, ... Georgie Gust... [L]ike Ben, Georgie depends on wealthy parents; a state of affairs that he uses to explore ... humiliation and kinky sex. After Georgie hires a neighbor named Claudia to torture him, ... he succumbs to a type of twisted love only his peculiar mind and circumstances could produce. At one point, Jonathan Harnisch introduces himself as a mentally ill artist in a string of beat-like sentences: "Thoughts. Thoughts bombard my head, my brain. My psyche.""

—Kirkus Reviews

Enter: Second Alibi: The Banality of Life

(The Banality of Enlightenment)

Second Alibi: The Banality of Life is the sensational prequel to the groundbreaking Jonathan Harnisch: An Alibiography. Harnisch's The Banality of Life handles the backstory of Georgie, Ben, and Claudia, further incorporating the invisible studio audience introduced in Alibiography. Ben's confessions flourish, written once more in his noteworthy and imaginative style. Harnisch seduces the reader by presenting a genuine, eerie sense of dissociation from the story, and once again conveys the feeling of what it is truly like to be mentally ill. There's an edge to Second Alibi that is beautifully countered by the author's personal story of how his writing helps him to rise above his own disorder, while allowing the rest of the world to understand what it is like to be mentally ill and how people with schizophrenia think and see their world.

—Editorial Dept.

The Outsider Artist

Hidden beneath his meticulously cluttered desk covered in piles of books sits a frozen, mysterious, mosaic-eyed man in a tattered brown-and-yellow plaid suit. His thick salt and pepper hair is shaggy and mussed, his face unshaven and his demeanor disheveled. His name is Jonathan Harnisch. Already up all night and day, and onto the second batch of serialized Alibiographies, he just can't stop. This writer writes fast, and, as one reviewer on Amazon.com wrote, "It's for the masses."

Following is the stream of consciousness currently communicating inside my head:

The drug I take is called schizophrenia, among other labels, which I desperately want to put away. I want to put the drug of schizophrenia down, and I want to put down the stigma surrounding its label.

—Ben

Author's Unabashed Introduction

Second Alibi is a pastiche of different storylines, genres, and writing styles. Per request, [Per whose request?] (Jump ahead to The Climactic Twist on the last page if it's killing you as it is for me to find out.) I respond to the process of my writing and style by keeping it raw, brazen, honest and real-deal; unabashed, uncut. Perhaps it's the genius of a mentally ill mind. No perhaps about it, truth be told. It most certainly is. It's the genius of a mentally ill mind, which one might or might not be able to feel. I present you with The Banality of Life. Love me, hate me, anger me,

or shame me, but I hope you will be able to find your own enlightenment and begin looking at your own realities in a different way. Other than that, until my next number, I might as well sell out here with this one, but maybe that's the illness speaking.

Jonathan Harnisch

—The Author

Op-Ed: Introduction/Foreword/Preface

I smile and scoff in favor of good fun, having just written the last line in the following sequel to *Alibiography*. The intro, foreword, preface, what-have-you, I am certain would entail unnecessary editorial hackwork in addition to my own considerable confusion about the difference between the three. But I will blatantly blame my confusion on the disorders, of course. I have several mental disorders. Mental illness and disease make my life that much more interesting than being diagnosis-free. But where's the truth? The truth! Truths! To journey into bitter bits and bites of the fictional back story, dispensing immaculate dissociations and the genesis of genius until the trilogy is due.

Editor's Preface

To The Author: "This was a great sequel to the prequel. I really liked how you handled the "back story" of Georgie/Ben/Claudia by making it into a screenplay. Not only does it provide the needed background, but it also gives the reader a truly eerie feeling of dissociation from the story, which gives the writing its needed "edge" to convey the feeling of what it is like to be mentally ill. That edge is then beautifully countered by your own personal story of how your writing is helping you to rise above your own disorder and let the rest of the world understand what it is like to be mentally ill: to reveal how people with schizophrenia think and how they see their world. You have done a real service here, and have used the Georgie/Ben/Claudia story perfectly. This is another brilliant read and the perfect sequel to the earlier book. It explains so much about mental illness that needs explaining by someone who knows. For this reason, I have been very gentle in the editing. The book was actually in pretty fantastic shape and needed more of a proofreading than brutal editing. I thought it was essential that your own voice be retained, as a) you are an excellent writer in your own right and b) your own writing voice and style give the book such a powerful sense of authenticity that I didn't want to ruin by correcting colloquialisms or conversational sentence fragments just for the sake of grammatical correctness. It is important for the reader to get to "know" you, Ben, and Georgie by letting them speak in their own voices, even if wildly ranting in places, as this is a major part of the disorder and therefore a key strength of the book. Thank you for allowing me to work on this sequel. I found it truly inspiring and uplifting, and it dispelled much of the sadness and horror that I had been left feeling at the end of the prequel. Cheers."

—Anonymous Editor

Buffering Back to the Beginning for a Sec

The Outsider Artist

Hidden beneath his meticulously cluttered desk covered in piles of books sits a frozen, mysterious, mosaic-eyed man in a tattered brown and yellow plaid suit. His thick salt and pepper hair is shaggy and mussed, his face unshaven and his demeanor disheveled. His name is Jonathan Harnisch.

Second Alibi

"Beware of artists. They mix with all classes of society and are therefore most dangerous."

—Queen Victoria

Statement of Internal Principle Laced with Arsenic . . .