

The Nonexistant

I am both infuriated and honored to write this introduction, for I was summoned from my excursion to collect *Laxita teneta* in Borneo by a man named Clarkvin Stanlace. When I landed in Cardiff, a gaggle of rather rotund men, all with lavender dress shirts and matching golden lapels, drove me to Stanlace's flat in Lisvane. It was made almost entirely out of one-way mirrors facing the wrong way, so that when I pressed my forehead to the bathroom wall from outside, I could see him through several walls, waiting for me in the dining room. But he could not see me.

He remained unmoving when I entered the room, his long fingers folded over a stack of papers and objects, and after a short pause he greeted me cordially and began to talk about a vacation we had supposedly been on and the calamari that a wife I didn't have used to make. It was only then that I told him I had no clue who he was, that I was unmarried, and that due to my strong allergy to shellfish, the squid meal would have been a murder. *A murder*, he echoed, and still looking down at his objects, he said to the men:

SO YOU GOT THE WRONG RAYE MACGUIRE

And then he asked me who I was.

Scene 1, House of One-Way Mirrors.

CLARKVIN STANLACE, renowned experimental author, sits at desk and looks at his hands. RAYE MACGUIRE, Lepidopterologist, looks uncomfortable surrounded by four walls.

MACGUIRE: I am *the other* Raye MacGuire. I am a Lepidopterologist.

STANLACE: *What does that MEAN?*

MACGUIRE: I study moths and the three superfamilies of butterflies.

{silence #1}

STANLACE: Do you have any experience in writing?

MACGUIRE: As far as scientific journaling, taxonomy, and phylogenetic trees go, yes.

{silence #2}

End of Scene

I was chosen, with an unconfounded nod and a look of glacial intensity from Stanlace, to write the introduction for a book I had not yet read.



It was only once I had accepted that he told me he was born blind. At that time, as someone whose entire career is based on the sharpness of one's eyes and whose last five months had been spent searching for a leaf-mimicking butterfly, I saw blindness as an insurmountable detriment. Stanlace consoled me, and told me that *The Nonexistant* would be the best book I had ever *felt*. "Just because I'm blind doesn't mean I can't have a vision," he says. Over the next two weeks, we travelled the French Polynesian islands hunting butterflies and reading his book. I read *The Nonexistant* twice, once with a blindfold and once without. Initially, it's terrifying, and not for those who are afraid of the dark.

I can only relate this book to one other experience, the night that we camped in the jungle of Bora Bora while searching for a subspecies of *Taenaris phorcas*, he read me his book without looking at it. Later, shortly after nightfall, a great lightning storm began, filling the sky with fleeting veins of sun. When I woke up around midnight, I found him standing in the middle of a clearing under a storm he could not see, and I hugged him.

The Nonexistant feels like lightning to a blind man, and a hug. It is a documentation of the unseen world done with surgical intelligence. It is a jungle of a book, in which every step of the way feels like you might just fall. *The Nonexistant* follows Stanlace's voyages around the globe as he describes a world, which is ours, but until now we have been oblivious to. Structured as a travel journal, the book introduces you to visual silence. Somehow, although relatively simple in plot, the book brings you into an invisible existence that feels like the womb. It is a piece that will evoke emotions you have felt only at the beginning of your precarious time on earth. It begs the question: what if we never opened our eyes? Stanlace's book is an exercise in perception. If you decide to read the book with your eyes open, be prepared for strange encounters with color. Chapter numbers are shown in colorblindness-test circles, and be forewarned that chapter fourteen is written in alternating lines of Sherwin-Williams "Roma Tomatoe" and "Greenbelt", which look like the same color under certain unfortunate optical cones but otherwise appear quite christmasy to your average reader. Often, words in this chapter that are Roma Tomatoe-colored are highlighted with greenbelt, making them invisible to organisms with red-green colorblindness and ultimately completely changing the story. For those who chose to read the book with their eyes exposed, page number 166 includes a series of perforations which you can fold into a miniature version of an art exhibit at Museu Serralves in Portugal that displays his works in adorable dimensions. Please do not mistake these for the multitude of braille perforations, or you will rip the book to shreds. Each painting comes with a museum label and critic's notes that detail Stanlace's works, like so:

Clarkvin Stanlace (b. 1932)

***The Colors You See With Your Eyes Closed*, 1985**

Oil on canvas

"A masterpiece. Filled with light, *The Colors You See With Your Eyes Closed* by Clarkvin Stanlace depicts a view we see during almost half of our lives and all of our deaths; the underneath of our eyelids."

- Sorya Amer

Clarkvin Stanlace (b. 1932)

***The Blue* , 1990**

Oil on canvas

- “What color is, to him. But instead of looking at it with sympathy, I find myself lost seeing how found he is. There is an indescribable
- fear barely contained by the four corners of the canvas. And
- although he will never know how blue the sky is, you will never
- appreciate the feeling of air.”

- Park Schjeldahl

Quite early on in the book, it is revealed that Stanlace has an insatiable love for touching things of all sizes, and when objects became too large for him to press his palms against, he had come up with new strategies. He longed to find a way to caress the mountains and eventually decided to have miniature dioramas of landforms made, so that he could touch all of them. “You can read them,” he tells me, “the volcanoes, the boulders, you can read them like braille. The cities are bullshit. Gibberish-” he said, feeling the tops of Westminster and missing the needle-like point of Big Ben by mere millimeters. “Blargh-spediblee-blee”. Later, he leads me to a bay window, in front of which there is a diminutive rendition of Southwestern Mauritius made of plastic trees on plastic mountains. And running his fingers over them, he read:

The Worm (Landscape Poem No. 33, page 78)

“Tunnel every once in a while, unencumbered by hearing or sight. Long creature of five hearts; looking at it, the worm is a moving heartbeat band.

In spring, when the worm is cut apart by calcium claws of crab, each heart grows into five, a cardiovascular hydra, adding to an underground orchestra that will never be heard by its own composers.”

When I ask him why the crab's hard hands didn't kill the worm, he only says that things of structure have nothing to do with things of soul. He then asks me how much I care about the texture of things. I tell him that I care quite a bit, since butterflies are covered in tiny scales and males have special scent scales, and that there can be as many as 600 individual scales per square millimeter of wing surface.

“ I would like to read that,” he says.



It is literally difficult to close the book, because Stanlace had many of the topographic maps of everything from fjords to canyons to atolls 3D printed on bioplastic pages. Typed out versions of the “landscape readings” are printed on flat surfaces such as plateaus and valleys, so they will need to be found by seeing-eye readers under a microscope at 40x magnification while blind readers can read simply by exploring the page with their fingertips. Aside from the landscape readings, you will be presented with an array of molds of objects and objects themselves. Bones, wings, seeds, and soil samples will often stand alone, while man-made objects will usually be found tangled together in great nests of electrical wire. On many pages, you will find collections, called “ecosystems”, which are formed from objects he believes go well together texturally. Examples of these include “All We Need,” made from assorted leaves wrapped around colored pencils and tied together to form a boat, and “Beginnings,” a structure made of thirty positive birth-control tests standing in place of the sarsens of Stonehenge, creating a circular formation.

This book questions what it means to be a book, since it can be understood without eyes, solely based on feeling, making words somewhat of a condiment that you can add to the experience if you so desire. Having your eyes open or closed while you read the book is a very personal choice for you, reader. To secure all of the 3D printed objects and maps, a chrysalidlike shield encases the book and can act as a comfortable blindfold during your reading experience. The blindfolded reading of the book engages

the reader's trust in a strange way. Throughout the blindfolded reading of *The Nonexistant*, our reasoning behind believing light as a symbol of knowledge, purity, and morality is gradually changed. At the beginning it may feel like you are sticking your hand into a cave of tarantulas, but as the book progresses, you become the tarantula- comfortable in the newfound darkness, and pitying bugs that are blinded by the light. Looking back, postlectorally, I would recommend five-sensed readers to explore less fearsome waters first. These include books that detail the loss of other senses, including Abdullah Hassan Sairih's exploratory poem collection on his life as a mute singer; *Speech Free*, and T.J. Morrison's novella about his tennis career as a deaf olympian; *A Racket In The Silence*.



I think about how they say “the eyes are the window to the soul”, and about how Stanlace's eyes, all iceberg blue, are like one way mirrors to his soul. We can see in, but he cannot see out. And yet, anyone who wears the blindfold realizes that the loss of a sense can be a gain. I come away from Stanlace's polyvalent book with a newfound love for the feel of things, and I hope you will too. I leave his house with a strange feeling that I am hovering, and I notice, for the first time, how the doorknob shakes my hand back, and how the air molds around my fingers like a cradle. I teeter on the edge of the doorstep and close my eyes. It is only then that I ask him to show me his hands. They are the most beautiful hands, scaly and soft like butterfly wings, and fingerprintless from so much feeling.