

Rich Murphy

## **Imperial Prototype**

[W]hat we call "deaths of despair," deaths from suicide, from drug overdose, from alcohol-related liver diseases, are on the upswing, and each successive birth cohort looks like they're at higher risk. There really is a decline of the American working class in the 20th century mortality rates for white, non-Hispanics in the U.S. – Ann Case and Angus Deaton

The economy that governs nudges,  
and the poor, the once working class,  
self-selects for self-neglect:  
Without alms, death  
welcomes with open arms.

Where banks channel cash flow,  
professionals with elbows  
and shoulder butts ponder  
over whether to shrink  
the means test pool  
where handouts trickle  
from leaky eye-duct branches.  
Pushing and shoving  
at the turn-off lever,  
the population thins, mystifying  
even the dying volunteer.

The social-engineers in suits  
(whether aware or ignorant)  
through hockey-masked  
and shoulder-padded agents  
consol for family members  
next in line to step forward.

## Bank Vault

Capital Darwinism lines up scavengers  
on cliff ledges and in the tree tops:  
Hedge fund cleanup craws  
and credit card packs maul.

No experts, no witnesses surveying salary  
infusions slowing to stop in debt for death.

The howl or caw welcome into the kingdom  
though outsiders need not, actually.

For two-legged desire chasers,  
reason, imagination, and love  
may have rescued from predators.

A more universal dream could have  
populated for all species  
where carcasses now sprawl rotted.

No archeologist brushes  
at mammoth wallet fossils.

Instead, at the mine mouth  
for the human resource department  
gold bricks trump into silence  
as though the cockroach were all, ever.

## Progress

The costumer, shackled  
in the needs-chain, shuffles  
in lock-step along serial dairy products,  
canned soup, and the extraction  
time-line check-out points.

New and improved,  
a believing owner digs  
deeper into credit card debt  
and pay day loans  
while a siphon sucks up  
into private jets and gated havens.

At every turn, desire trips  
on good enough or over pie-in-the-sky.  
After the fall, Mr. Please wakes  
to a dozen begs quivering  
for more upon the pouting lower lip.

From rice bowl to a house  
in the burbs, want droops, a sack  
over belts churning and growling  
for a bite . . . for taste.

## Backseat Drivers

Formal curiosity dresses in a lab coat  
and either hovers over tables in goggles

or gathers in the sky through a tube  
and sonar, each with augmented senses:

Findings = Top hat / tails + ceremony.

Bottom-feeding curiosity disinfects  
to remove dollar signs from hands  
and then gets to work on jerry-rigging  
controlled disclosures to lack sacks:

Bottom-lines = Marketing champagne  
(Envy donning empathy + wallet).

Need-drills organize in the streets  
from toe tips to frowns to crowns

while jingles dangle dreams  
at every turn, each straight-away  
and admen fashion echo chambers  
on shoulders and yodel into the abysses.

Bubbles froth over a test tube;  
asteroids rain into the atmosphere;  
sea levels spume through cities.  
Scientists sit in the backseat  
on the way to town.

## Farming Acquiescence

The pitchfork precision patrols  
retired from performances  
when a kettle-bottom drum  
and desperation lit up the whole town,  
prompting 100 years later  
CCTV cameras and militarized  
police to lurk around every corner.

Called in then to drill for gold in wallets,  
hypnotists drugged with debt  
workers and scarecrows  
so that resentment now rocks  
to and fro nowhere jobs.  
The peasants sit on executive laps  
emoting wooden talking points:  
Boardrooms laugh at the puppet state.

Consumed by malls and social media,  
lifetimes after lifetimes in tandem  
digest with permission granted  
but without self-control.  
Insight unshared by commuters  
and shoppers imprisons for life  
while any will to empower  
never discovered organization:  
No teach ins, no affinity groups.  
“Of the people, for the people,  
by the people” RIP.