

The book I chose to rant or rave about is Trina Paulis', ***Hope for the Flowers***. The cover tells me *it's a tale – partly about life, partly about revolution and lots about hope for adults and others (including caterpillars who can read.)* It was written in 1972, self-published and when ordered off Amazon comes with a cassette tape of the author reading the book as well as her reflections. Yes, she uses the word “reflections.”

I don't remember when I first got the book, but I would have to suspect it had something to do with being a kid in Mill Valley in the 1970's with wheatgerm in my bottle and no knowledge of what a grape was until my adolescence because of my mother's ongoing boycott due to the mistreatment of migrant workers. A book about caterpillars and revolution shouldn't be that mystifying as to its origins.

In a nutshell, the book is about Stripe and Yellow – two caterpillars who are trying to figure out what life is really about. Stripe – the male – is introduced to us first: *Once upon a time a tiny striped caterpillar burst from the egg which had been home for so long. “Hello world,” he said, “It sure is bright out here in the sun.”* But within a matter of pages and with just a few leaves eaten, Stripe becomes jaded. Paulis goes on to let us know that in his solitary quest for more, things may fascinate him, but nothing satisfies him. UNTIL: *one day Stripe saw some crawlers really crawling. He looked around and saw their goal and saw a great column rising high into the air. When he joined them he discovered the column was a pile of squirming, pushing, caterpillars --- a CATERPILLAR PILLAR.*

We're introduced to this concept of a Caterpillar Pillar as some rat racian metaphor – the grind, if you will. What are we all doing and do we even know why we're doing it? Or are we all just climbing our own Caterpillar Pillar because that's what our parents did and that's what we're supposed to do.

It's in the Caterpillar Pillar that Stripe meets Yellow - the female. Who is introduced to us as collateral damage in Stripe's climb. As he's climbing over her he blurts out that he doesn't even know why he's climbing in the first place, to which Yellow says, *“You know, I was wondering that myself but since there's no way to find out I decided it wasn't important.”* She blushed at how silly this sounded. I'm going to cut in here and point out that for a revolutionary, Paulis certainly writes her women as if Natalie Portman were going to be playing them in the movie version with The Shins as soundtrack. Yellow continues, *“No one else seems to worry about where we're going so it must be good.”* But she blushed again. *“How far are we from the top?”* So clearly, at this stage in the game, Yellow is a loveable idiot and Stripe is the tortured philosopher.

But, as it happens, Yellow's humanity kicks Stripe out of his determined climb and as she quietly sobs he realizes that there's more to life than stepping on people to attain an unknowable goal. They resolve to climb down the Caterpillar Pillar together and then the book has this whole Caterpillar Kama Sutra thing going on...and then, shock of all shocks, Stripe: our little Worm Hamlet becomes bored

once again. Stripe lobbies for them to climb the Caterpillar Pillar once more, Yellow reasons with him that they have a nice home and Volvo in the driveway – what’s the problem? Stripe, unable to be tamed, announces, *“I’ve got to know. I must go and find out the secret to the top. Will you come and help me?”* Yellow struggles. *She can’t believe that the top is worth all it asks to get there. She wants to succeed, too; the crawling life isn’t enough for her either. She also has to admit that the Caterpillar Pillar looks like the only way to succeed. Yellow then feels stupid and embarrassed since she can never put her reasons into words that his kind of logic would accept. Yet somehow, waiting and not being sure is better than action she doesn’t believe in.*

Stripe and Yellow break up.

Stripe immediately dives into the Caterpillar Pillar. Even amongst fellow climbers, he’s special. Ruthless.

Yellow is lost without Stripe. She wants to do something, anything rather than this uncertain waiting, “What in the world do I really want? It seems different every few minutes. But I know there must be more.” She becomes numb and wanders away from everything familiar, only to happen upon an aging caterpillar (clearly to be voiced by Morgan Freeman) who is cocooning himself. When Yellow asks what a butterfly is he replies, “It’s what you are meant to become. It flies with beautiful wings and joins the earth to heaven. It drinks the nectar from the flowers and carries the seeds of love from one flower to another.” Yellow is in disbelief, “How can I believe there’s a butterfly inside of me when all I see is a fuzzy worm.”

Now, I’m going to break in here once again. I read this as a kid, but found it again when I was in my early twenties. It was the halcyon days of quoting the Velveteen Rabbit and giving the Tao of Pooh as gifts. I was more than a little insecure and to read about a little caterpillar who didn’t believe she had what it took to be a beautiful butterfly – well, let’s just say I was head over heels, misty eyed, listening to Tori Amos on repeat (when not blaring it at prospective suitors as my “true feelings”) and ripe for the Hope for the Flowers revolution. What seems now as silly exposition and fodder for rolled eyes was gospel to me then.

Yellow takes the leap and cocoons herself with promises of finding Stripe and showing him the way. Stripe, who is now in some Trainspotting meets Wall Street epic climb, is now at the top of the Caterpillar Pillar. But his success is soured by the cruel realization that, now at the top, he can see this his pillar is one of thousands. Millions of caterpillars climbing to nowhere. He questions everything: his life with Yellow seems so far away, did she know something he didn’t? Could he go back down the Caterpillar Pillar without looking ridiculous? It’s just then that a beautiful yellow winged creature flits gracefully up to the top of the Caterpillar Pillar and reaches out to him.

Could it be? But, no. Not for our little Hamlet, “Such impossible thoughts! Yet the excitement inside wouldn’t stop. He grew happy. Somehow he could escape, he could

*be carried away. But as this possibility became real, something else grew inside. He felt he shouldn't escape like this. Looking into the creature's eyes he could hardly bear the love he saw there. He felt unworthy. (Sidebar: this book enabled far too many shit relationships where I convinced myself that a dude was "so in love with me he was afraid of what it meant." A dark underbelly to **The Hope for the Flowers** revolution) Stripe continues, "He wanted to change, to make up for all the time he had refused to look at the other. He tried to tell her what he felt. He stopped struggling. He turned around and began down the pillar."*

Stripe tries to tell all the caterpillars on the way down that there's nothing at the top – they either don't listen or tell him, "Don't say it even if it's true. What else can we do?" The music swells and the little striped Caterpillar, now with a painted blue face begins to tell his band of brothers that not on this day (wow, Braveheart, Henry V and Lord of the Rings all in one swoop) "We can fly! We can become butterflies! There's nothing at the top and it doesn't matter!"

Stripe climbs down off the pillar exhausted and soul sick. He awakens to find the beautiful yellow winged creature. "Is this a dream?" The very real butterfly motions for him to follow, he does. She guides him to the place where she cocooned herself and he follows suit. *It gets darker and darker and he's afraid.*

He feels he has to let go of...everything.

And Yellow waited....

until one day....

When I was asked to rant or rave about a book, I immediately thought of **Hope for the Flowers**. And then I was just as quickly hit with this embarrassing outing of sorts. Would I rant or would I rave? The book is all kinds of ridiculous sage hippieisms and panders to every cliché that even Sark distances herself from whilst eating mangoes in an Adirondack chair or whatever she does in purple dresses and red hats. But the truth is that this book hit me at exactly the right time – a time where I was searching for something to tell me that I was more than the sum of my parts. It affected me so much that – at the time I was attending The American Academy of Dramatic Arts – and I chose to do an interpretive dance in homage.

I'm going to repeat that.

I chose to do an interpretive dance in homage to **Hope for the Flowers**.

There were wings made of sheets. There was pvc pipe held together by duct tape and desperation – an elaborate mechanism allowing me to properly cocoon and then in a glorious Phoenix like rising – become the winged creature that I truly believed myself to be. The entire thing set to music from the movie Toys with Robin

Williams. (Closing of the Year/Happy Workers by Hans Zimmer for those who'd really like to envision the majesty.)

It became a benchmark of sorts. Do you love it enough to do interpretive dance to it? I loved him so much he made me do interpretive dance. I loved that song so much it made me do interpretive dance.

I couldn't quit **Hope for the Flowers** after I'd loved it so much it made me do interpretive dance. So, I'm raving. I'm raving about Hope for the Flowers.

I've been so careful to cultivate the proper persona over the years. Certain books left wispily out for guests who happen upon the Richard Ford that I just..you know...just finished. Whatever. That? That's just Notes from Underground. Loved it. Whatever. What's on my iPod? Oh, that's just this new Lithuanian Zither Troop that no one's heard of. Oh you...you haven't heard of them? Pity. I fancy myself on the cutting edge of all things hip and here I am on the cusp of admitting - in Silverlake no less - that I, Liza Palmer, loved Hope for the Flowers. Loved it so much it made me do interpretive dance.

As a writer I've had to come to terms with this idea that things that are good are bad for you and things that are bad are good for you. Books that are arduous and difficult are somehow more meaningful, while books that thread the same themes into a more page turning content are somehow less than. As if, the phrase so often said, pleasure is something we need to feel guilty about. The bait of sin, as Plato said.

I was on deadline, a mean deadline, and a group of friends invited me to go see Bon Jovi in concert at Staples Center. I was exhausted and thought there was no way I could take the time to do something I believed, at best, I would only be experiencing ironically. But, I went. And it was somewhere in the middle of Born to Be My Baby where I looked around the packed stadium at tens of thousands of people on their feet, singing along to every word. I was happy. Whether it was due to exhaustion or whatever, I was malleable enough to leave my attitude and declarations of Lithuanian Zither Troops at the door and just...enjoy myself.

Pleasure is a good thing and if something makes you happy, makes you think differently and changes your trajectory in even the smallest of ways then root for it, rave about it and stand up for it when people try to convince you that only idiots believe in lame stories about a couple of caterpillars.