



Disturbance

Philippe Lançon

Steven Rendall, Translator

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Stalin's quip that "one death is a tragedy, one million is a statistic" gets to the essence of how we become numbed by the frequency of mass shootings. We simply can't compute the magnitude of such horror, but to read about the random death of a child might bring a sudden welling of tears. Such is the way our humanity conceals and reveals itself.

The ISIS-inspired assault on the Paris offices of the satirical newspaper *Charlie Hebdo* was but one of more than 11,000 terrorist attacks around the world in 2015, though the *Hebdo* atrocity—twelve killed, eleven injured—was unique because the targets were writers and illustrators, including Philippe Lançon, a freelance journalist who survived with dreadful wounds to his jaw and arms. Originally published in France to great acclaim, Lançon's memoir, *Disturbance*, is a visceral, all-but-overwhelming account of his recovery.

In recollecting the actual attack, Lançon refers to himself as "the man who wasn't quite dead," while the brains of a colleague "sticking out somewhat from his head" lurk just inches away. Shortly thereafter, he writes of receiving the first few hospital visitors: "I was still floating between life and death and I was still a virgin with regard to other people's reactions [to his facial wounds]: each apparition deflowered me." Unrelenting, mesmerizing, and beautifully written, *Disturbance* is transformative.

MATT SUTHERLAND (November / December 2019)

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