

Lazy at Stanford

Michael Lazaar

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Suffused with tenderness, Lazy at Stanford is an earnest memoir-in-essays covering major personal challenges.

Michael Lazaar's sprawling essay collection *Lazy at Stanford* includes both fragmented diaristic litanies and hyperspecific musings on topics like psychosocial theory.

Drawing on Lazaar's experiences with having failed to complete his undergraduate degree at Stanford University, the book begins by contrasting this with the prestige of attending Stanford to begin with. This establishes the autocritical tension that directs the book—and that provides the impetus behind many of its ideas. It is made up of five major sections, including "Bipolar Disorder," "Therapy," "Self Help," and "Psychology." Each of these sections contains between six and seventeen short essays. Other minor sections, including "Exist" and "Marijuana," contain as few as one essay each, or in some cases just a few phrasal notes.

Confessional in tone, the book covers Lazaar's troubled past with his competitive brother, who is referred to only as a "beast." It also alludes to an unrequited past romance. Such thorny and shameful topics are handled with reflexive vulnerability, as when the book questions whether Lazaar's college infatuation was a result of a manic state or whether the manic state was brought on by the infatuation, and whether his fraught fraternal relationship was precipitated by fierce manic competitiveness or vice versa. Owing to the humility of such self-interrogations, the book is suffused with tenderness.

Avowing its own provisionalism and rejecting any formal methods of inquiry, *Lazy at Stanford* eschews the established conventions of intellectual investigation. There is a certain charm to its raw enthusiasm, though its psychosocial philosophies aren't fully persuasive. It reinvents familiar theories and combines established terminology with esoteric neologisms. Several subsections are made up of scraps of working notes; such formal improprieties result in a disorganized feel. And while the book begins with energy and in a journalistic mode, as it continues, it devolves into a series of underdeveloped, overly general arguments about the roles of technology and evolution in modern society. In the second and longest section, devoted to meditations on bipolar disorder, its work is limited to cursory extrapolations on themes grafted from the clinical milieu. For instance, "Medical Doctor's Biological Bias" makes the question of the biological influences on bipolar disorder a recurrent point of reference, but without citing particular studies or claims about the nature of those influences.

Lazy at Stanford is an experimental memoir that self-interrogates, covering personal challenges in an earnest, confessional way.

ANTHONY HAMILTON (May 7, 2024)

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