

## Outbursts of a Pretentious Hypocrite: Thoughts of an Enlisted Slave, Year Three

**Baethan Balor**

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*Outbursts of a Pretentious Hypocrite is a dizzying text—part memoir, part discourse on bleak realities and dark, surreal circumstances.*

Baethan Balor's third memoir *Outbursts of a Pretentious Hypocrite* is a raw, often revolting look at the sickness of modernity and its people, both viewed through damaged eyes.

Dedicated to Balor's ego and told through a series of journal entries, eavesdropped on conversations, fictionalized scenes, and dreams that occurred between November of 2018 and November of 2019, this meandering text is held together by the overarching perspective that contemporary humanity is a horror. Its considerations extend to other people and characters—almost all of whom come from the bottom strata of civilization—like a child rapist who engages in a surreal discussion with an ascetic; a dishwasher who contemplates life; and a murderous clown who wields a machete at his enemies for no logical reason at all. The jaundiced narrator names what is ugly in all, and their rambling discourse also wonders how much uglier circumstances can get.

While the book has memoir elements, some of its portions are too absurd to be true, heightening the strangeness and undefinability of its text. By the end, little that the narrator says can be believed, though troubling truths arise through their pronouncements, including about death, depression, and the futility of living just to die one day. Such egoism becomes overbearing as the text progresses; its overabundance of crass language, though it matches the book's focus on social outcasts, is also tiresome. However, the self-indulgent and self-absorbed narrator sometimes seems to be the perfect vehicle for examining contemporary life and its warts.

The book's quasi-epistolary form makes its chaotic nature more apparent. Though the journal entries could result in a structured and clear timeline, they instead function as a disparate series of entries that alternate between horrifying content and pitch black comedy. This fluctuation comes to seem to be the book's point: its philosophical core is nihilism, colored by a large dose of terror. Its hard-edged, sharp prose is a benefit; though its scenes are scattered, they are individually memorable, evoking pity and disgust in the same breath. The overarching, detached tone, absent emotional appeals from the narrator, also makes the book more impactful, suggesting that its sentences are too deep for outsiders to comprehend.

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BENJAMIN WELTON (February 4, 2021)

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