

# De Minimis

Tuesday, 2nd of May

Volume 11, Issue 9

www.deminimis.com.au

## The Co-op Bookshop: Failing Students?

**Duncan Wallace**

*“Hey guys, some of you may be aware of the dire circumstances surrounding the Dal Pont book. Three copies missing from the library, sold out at the Co-opt. Truly sad stuff.”*

*“I tried to borrow a book from the high-use section of the law library today, only to be told by the librarian that three copies (which only arrived from the publishers last week) have already been stolen - presumably by students.”*

As these quotes from Facebook show, law students this semester have again been having problems with the Co-op Bookshop failing to supply the textbooks they need for their studies. I say again, because last semester a similar problem was raised: for one subject, the Co-op had failed to order a full half of the textbooks a law professor had asked them to provide.

“I am continuing the fight but, again, your firm representation to the Co-op regarding the need for prompt supply of the book will be very helpful in getting the message across (not just for this subject but for the others too where I understand this has been a problem),” the professor implored students in an email.

The Co-op Bookshop’s supposed *raison d’être* is to facilitate student access to textbooks. This was the reason the organisation came into existence in the first place - two students at the University of Sydney, Malcolm Broun and John Sharwood, saw that a significant service could be rendered, and in 1958 began bulk-buying and selling textbooks at low prices out of a garage. The co-operative structure was used so that the students who bought the textbooks from them could retain democratic control of the organisation and ensure that it acted in their best interests.

Clearly, it has ceased to do so.

Criticising an Adelaide University bookshop, then CEO of the Co-op, Peter Knock, stated in 2015 that “the problem was their business model just sold textbooks”. It is unclear why this is a problem. He stated in the next

sentence that their business model was still profitable.

Though we can only speculate, the reason concentrating on textbooks may seem like a problem for the small clique that control the Co-op is that they are a hubristic bunch interested in empire building more than anything else. Ingrained in a neoliberal culture of growth at any cost, the clique is blind to the notion that growth can be antithetical to delivering value to the Co-op’s shareholders – the students who buy their textbooks. The value that the Co-op’s owners – us – see in the Co-op is its ability to provide them textbooks on time and at a good price. Indeed, while the Co-op is succeeding in increasing its revenue growth – revenue this year is \$133 million, up almost \$10 million from last year – the profits on such revenue have decreased by \$200k.

Overall, the Co-op remains loss-making. This year total losses were almost \$1.5million.

So how has the Co-op diversified its business beyond textbooks? If you go into one of their stores, you’ll find it difficult to find any books at all. What you find instead are various kinds of garish merchandise. The Co-op seems more interested in feeding us consumerist crap than delivering a valuable service. You’ll also notice that the Co-op has taken to playing very loud upbeat pop music so that your eyes don’t have to be alone in being offended.

And the crap the Co-op is selling really is crap. While the Co-operative National Law requires co-operatives to act to further the interests of their community, the Co-op Bookshop has refused to consider sourcing their hoodies, t-shirts and other merchandise

sustainably or ethically. Etiko, a fair trade manufacturer and importer of textiles, was told that students don’t want to pay an extra \$10 to have a hoodie they can be assured is made without sweatshop labour. Law students have shown this to be entirely wrong – the Melbourne University Law Student Society last year sold Etiko fair-trade hoodies and did just fine.

To the extent that bookshops do need to do more than selling books, owing to increased competition from online retailers such as Amazon, the evidence suggests that the Co-op is doing the opposite of what has proven successful.

In the US, for example, big bookstore chains are being out-competed by online retailers, but local, independent bookshops are doing a rebound – there has been a 25% increase in smaller bookstores over the last few years.

Michael Shuman, a specialist in economic development, has [stated](#) that by defining their “business model as bringing together the community, being a good restaurant point, being a good coffee house point, being a good book club point, they started bringing people back to the local bookstores”.

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## The Co-Op Bookshop Continued...

And such local bookshops play an extremely important role in their local community. In a now famous study in 2002, which has been corroborated by many subsequent studies, researchers found that \$100 spent at a chain bookshop circulated \$13 in the local economy. By contrast, that same \$100 spent at a local bookshop circulated \$45. Every dollar spent at a local bookshop contributed three times the jobs, income effects, and tax benefits to the local economy as compared to a dollar spent at a chain store. The ratios are even worse when local bookshops are compared with online retailers.

So what can we do? Fortunately we, as members of the Co-op, get voting rights. Enough of us working together can take back our Co-op and ensure that, once again, it is run in our interests.

The bad news is that the current clique controlling the Co-op are willing to engage in potentially illegal blocks to student participation. For example, a couple of weeks ago a contingent of over 30 students, armed with dozens of proxies, attended the Annual General Meeting of the Co-op to try and assert their rights as members and to reform the Co-op so that it reflects student interests. This was a tremendous effort given that the AGM was held in Kooindah Waters, Wyong, 100 kilometres from the Co-op's head office in Surry Hills, and that the Co-op potentially violated the Co-operatives National Law by failing to give adequate notice of the AGM.

Nevertheless, the Co-op blocked the students' efforts. After telling the students that their proxies were invalid, the Co-op Secretary attempted to silence inquisitive members, saying, "you're not here to ask questions. This isn't Q and A." The Chair then refused to address why the students' proxies were deemed invalid, despite all specifications of Rule 52 of the Co-op's constitution being followed by in submitting proxy votes.

This is not where things will be left. Please follow the Facebook page *Take Back Our Co-opt* to follow moves to take back our Co-op from its current controllers.

Ultimately, if we are to ensure the democratic control of the Co-op by its members, I believe that we will have to decentralise it. Each campus Co-op must be independent of its sibling organisations, though to retain economies of scale on a number of fronts they must be federated together in a "group co-operative".

**Duncan Wallace is a Fourth Year JD Student**

# STOP CALLING ME 'PERSON OF COLOUR'

ANONYMOUS

I'm not white. This fact is surely noticed by most people upon meeting me, although I think it's far from the most interesting thing about me, and not something that I constantly think about. Nonetheless, in instances of discrimination and racism, as well as more benign social exchanges that I've faced, it's something that I'm instantly reminded of. Nothing like being asked the brilliant "Where are you from?" in a circle of otherwise only white people to make your day. Or, to be spoken of as a 'person of colour'.

I'm proud of my heritage. It's of course not always a bad thing to be reminded of; for most of us, there are moments of intense perspective, meaning and value that can be drawn from thinking about our roots, and enjoyment, community and identity are experienced by engaging with it as well.

It's also great that there has been an increased focus on diversity in social discourse; and in particular relevance to *De Minimis* readers, firms are starting to be more conscious of having a broader selection of backgrounds and racial mix in their candidates. Ideally, it shouldn't have to be so conscious: but until there are no longer unconscious (or outright bigoted) biases that often cause people to prefer white candidates, this may have to suffice.

At the same time, it's disheartening to hear the phrase 'person of colour' (or worse yet, the more dehumanising 'PoC') used so frequently in not just social movements and campuses, but in professionalised contexts as well. When we use that phrase, what we do is entrench condescension and difference.

I understand that what using the phrase 'person of colour' is intended to do is be well-meaning. It intends to recognise that there is substantive disadvantage and different experiences often faced by those of us who aren't white. It recognises that non-whites are often marginalised, and allows us to have the realities of the perspective we are speaking from acknowledged.

But here's the thing; when you say 'people of colour' what you're really meaning is 'people who aren't white'. So, if you're saying 'people of colour' because the phrase you'd otherwise be saying might come across as racist, remember that you're singling out people on the basis of their race or relative lack of whiteness. So, if you're

going to do that, if you're going to make a point about the differences non-whites face, you either need to rethink what you're about to say or just be transparent about what you're doing rather than using a misguided term for supposed PC credibility.

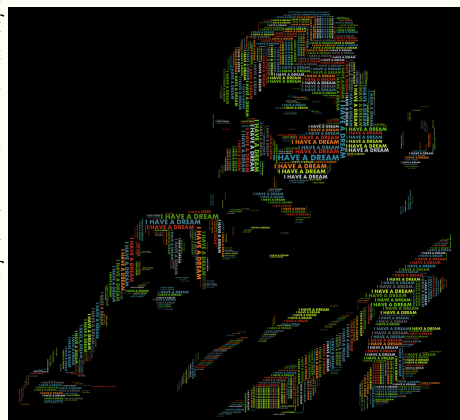
The most important thing to remember about the phrase 'person of colour' is that it's really just a rephrasing of 'coloured person'. This word was frequently used in a derogatory manner in pre-civil rights United States and is not acceptable in a 21st-Century context. Does re-arranging the words and adding an 'of' really make it any different? I don't think so.

I understand the idea that a word can change its meaning, can be reclaimed, and reused in a positive context. But, I would take issue with the rationale that that's what has happened here: instead, it's the reuse of a formerly racist term in the guise of progressiveness while really just treating the lack of whiteness as a paramount quality of non-whites.

It should be considered about as acceptable as the magical negro trope; those of us who aren't white are imbued with some sort of crude 'magical', 'colourful', 'soulful', 'spiritual' quality that makes us differ from the norm and lets us be used as tokenistic caricatures.

Lumping all of us who aren't white into some abstract category of being 'people of colour' further reinforces whiteness as the norm, rather than challenging its status as the dominant hegemony. It strips away our hopes, fears, successes, failures, flaws, strengths, beauty and ugliness away from being the meaningful qualities that define us and instead decides that our 'colour' is what makes us special. I don't want you to respect me as a 'person of colour'.

I want you to respect me as a person.





## SOUNDTRACK TO THE FUTURE

*Run The Jewels 3* electrocutes your brain with an imagining of the America to come

Cam Doig

This is a fertile time for visions of the future, particularly for our American cousins. Gerontocrats, waging a war against women's reproductive rights, are making feminist speculative fiction unhappily instructive. The murder of human hoppers-after-refuge in seas, camps and deserts galvanises those who are pessimists by intellect, optimists by will, and visionary creators by empathetic compulsion. And while resurgent race-patriotism plunges industrialised nations into sectarian, proto-fascist ructions, two artists are talking about what's coming and what to do.

'I look at this album like a movie, almost like an Escape from New York, with a black kid and a white kid trying to escape a modern-day, post-apocalyptic New York,' says Killer Mike. That album is *Run The Jewels 3*, the latest collaboration between Atlanta-born rapper Michael Render (Killer Mike, the former escapee) and

rapper/producer Jaime Meline (El-P, the latter). Together, they are hip-hop supergroup *Run the Jewels*, or *RTJ*. A former dealer, social critic and anti-police violence activist, Mike marries braggadocio, rumbling aggression, and narrow-eyed cynicism about the vices and hypocrisy of the powerful. El is less an escapee from John Carpenter's 1980s Manhattan Prison, and more like an illegal outpatient of Arkham Asylum.

He is a hyperactive futurist paranoiac; a perennial Brooklynite child with authority issues, and puns spurt with film references and conspiracy theories from his overcaffeinated mouth. If Mike provides the visceral Southern meatiness, El-P brings the electrifying word-games and linguistic gymnastics. The two dovetail thematically, musically, and personally (describing each other as brothers), and bridge experiential divides to make something perfectly coherent: 'Not from the same part of town, but we hear the same sound coming/And it sounds like war.'

With *RTJ 3*, El and Mike have weaponised hip hop to create a flashy, futuristic, revolutionary incitement. Hip-hop distrusts the white-supremacist state, documents racial violence, emphasises material markers of social status, condemns

fakeness, and interrogates tensions between individual success and social emancipation. For *RTJ* – already acutely disgusted by clerical, corporate, or state bullshit, and responding to a TV-celebrity KKK-endorsee who sucks down chocolate cake while bombing people of colour – the genre is perfectly calibrated.

Post-election tumult renders the album's vision kaleidoscopic, traversing the DeLorean, corruption, racialised poverty, Children of Men, life under floodlights, and spiritual warfare. When harnessed, this vision's rage burns into that orange forehead. On *Talk to Me*, Mike leers, *Went to war with the devil and Shaitan / He wore a bad toupée and a spray tan*. Elsewhere, he raises a preemptive middle finger to what's coming: *Fucking fascist, who the fuck are you to give fifty lashes?*

*RTJ 3* is never quiet, but can be chilling – on *Don't Get Captured*, ominous dragging synths score gentrification, supernatural haunting, and smartphone footage of racist police murders. Hopelessness and rage bubble up in the collective consciousness. At the album's core is *2100*, with El-P and Mike reaching from the dread of genocide, towards plans for glorious revolution calls for salvation and exhortations to just peace:

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## LITERARY LINES FROM ELIF

Elif Sekerciogu

In a moment of literary narcissism, I recently acquired the novel *The Idiot* by Elif Batuman. If you search my name online (Elif Sekerciogu), the algorithm elves spit out a 2011 New Yorker article called *Natural Histories*, in which Elif Batuman interviews her friend Çagan.

Sekerciogu, a 'conservation ecologist, ornithologist, tropical biologist, and nature photographer'. He is a fascinating fellow – the article notes, delightfully, that 'In high school, Çagan found a rare beetle specimen and donated it to the Harvard entomology collection.' Our algorithmic connection feels significant to me in some way. Devastatingly I am not actually related to Çagan Sekerciogu because he sounds like a very cool relative to have. None of this is especially relevant to the book review I am ostensibly writing right now, except that this gem of an article portends the pleasingly meandering style of *The Idiot*.

The New Yorker article is about Çagan's work in conservation, but Batuman also delves into the history of the city of Kars, made famous in the novel *Snow* by Turkey's first Nobel Laureate, Orhan Pamuk, a novel which Batuman then goes on to discuss (as a Turkish 'person of letters', inevitably she is asked about Pamuk in interviews; her scandalous response 'I was unable to finish Pamuk' made the headline). It's not stream-of-consciousness but both the New

Yorker article and *The Idiot* make good use of digressions to discuss more than what appears to be the subject-matter of the text. 'Natural Histories' is about bird conservation, but it's also about the passions of the single-minded scientist and Batuman's encounters with various colourful people, for example, 'Emrah, Çagan's science coordinator, was charged with retrieving dog carcasses from the city dumps and depositing them in random locations around Aras, to see how the vultures reacted. The vultures reacted well.'

Similarly, *The Idiot* is about an eighteen-year old American girl who goes off to Harvard and meets a boy. It's also a novel about language. It does what the best writing should do, which is to articulate a feeling that those of us not bestowed with novelist talents are unable to express ourselves. In one stunning passage, Batuman hits upon something I sensed about Turkish but would never be able to find the words for: 'the suffix – mis had no exact English equivalent... when you heard – mis, you knew that you had been invoked in your absence – not just you but your hypocrisy, cowardice, and lack of generosity.'

The narrative is relatively straight-forward. Selin starts college at Harvard. She signs up to inexplicable and trendy classes like 'Constructed Worlds', and makes friends with fellow Harvardians who have names like Svetlana and Fern (it's the 1990s). Selin becomes infatuated with Ivan, who is Hungarian and in her Russian language class. Because the year is 1995, naturally their relationship kick-starts via a series of e-mails about Lenin and existentialism. Ivan has a girlfriend (named Eunice!) who drifts in and

out of the story. Selin is an unreliable narrator, because she never quite grasps how dodgy it is of Ivan to take her out to drink beer at basement bars and write her heartfelt emails whilst also maintaining a girlfriend.

Selin doesn't know who she is yet. Like Richard Papen in *The Secret History*, she is swept up in events without quite knowing how she got there. Inevitably, in the second half of the novel she follows Ivan to Hungary to teach English to the children of Hungarian villages. Plaintively, she writes in an email to Ivan, 'I don't understand anything that happens, or how.' I felt like that at eighteen too: how did people know they liked beer, and Russian literature? Where did such strong convictions come from?

I feel a bit traitorous admitting this, but I much preferred *The Idiot* to the works of that other famous Elif, the one you've probably heard of – Elif Safak. Of her novels that I have read, I felt like Safak's characters and narrative were flimsy because they existed just to service a moral message, a style of novel that I find irritating.

*The Idiot* met my ultimate criterion for a bedtime read, which is the novel's capacity to tranquilise my frenetic internal monologue. The font is large, the sentences are crisp, and the characters and narrative feel real and engaging. Elif Batuman is getting serious attention in the media, so I suggest you read her novel now, so you can say you thought she was cool before the whole world did too.

*Elif Sekerciogu is a Second Year JD Student*

# INHIBITING THE BLUE MOODS



## Eugene Twomey

Every day, normally in the morning, I take a tablet containing 50 milligrams of Sertraline. I've been doing this for about a year now. According to drugs.com, sertraline is one of a group of drugs known as selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors.

Reassuringly, the way these drugs work is "still not fully understood". They do seem effective, however, in treating conditions including anxiety and depression. While I still suffer from both to various degrees, the medication has made a considerable difference to the way I feel day to day.

I decided to write this article because I feel that, while we are getting better and better at talking about mental health, there are probably still people out there who balk at the idea of treating these problems pharmaceutically.

For a long time, I had a reluctance to do so myself. Objectively, I lead a charmed life. I have a supportive family that are prepared to

help me deal with my problems, whether emotional or financial. I find law school intellectually fulfilling, and I've been able to do well without sacrificing other things that are important to me.

I have good prospects for the future, and at least for now have some hope that I will enjoy whatever I end up doing. I have a good circle of old friends outside this building, and while I've been here I've formed a lot of great new friendships. With all of this going right for me, I felt like I shouldn't need to be on medication, that taking it would be an admission of failure.

Early last year, I began to second guess my reluctance. I noticed that what I thought of as "blue moods", times when I felt increasingly isolated and depressed, were becoming more common. Despite believing, on an intellectual level, that I was enjoying my life, my emotional state was getting worse and worse. Feelings of isolation began to trigger panic, and recurrent unwanted thoughts about my own lack of worth

became harder and harder to shake.

Eventually, after seeing a family member get on the same drug with good results, I talked to my family, and then to my doctor. I began trialling Sertraline, and after the initial dosage didn't cause any really heinous side effects, I began the daily routine described above.

Since then, my mental state has improved. While I haven't completely conquered my demons, the worst effects of depression now manifest with far less frequency. I'm able to enjoy things more, and am less affected when things go wrong.

The near paralysis I was experiencing during the worst times has become much less common, and when it does happen it's normally because I got careless and missed a couple of days.

I don't know whether my story will resonate for anyone reading, but I thought it was worth the attempt. If you think you might need help, please don't think it is a failure to ask for it. I believe that self-care and meditation can be very useful, but I also feel that there should be no stigma on seeking other forms of help if you feel you need them.

I consider myself an intelligent person, and for a long time I thought I could think my way around my depression. I now appreciate that, in my case at least, it doesn't work that way. I needed something more, and my life has gotten better since I found it.

**Eugene Twomey is a Third Year JD Student**  
**If someone you know is struggling, start a conversation today.**

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'Make love, smoke kush, try to laugh hard, and live long/That's the antidote/You defeat the devil when you hold onto hope'.

And with their shift from horror-movie influences towards sci-fi grit, *RTJ* could have blasted this album back through a wormhole, from 2100, in a satellite time capsule. El-P's gleaming production glares unignorable from tracks like *Call Ticketron*, turning a Max Headroom-like vocal hook from an automated call centre into this shattered future's broken digital narrator.

Bass kicks punch under exhausted arcade-esque synths, while El equivocates, 'The hovercraft's cool, but the air's so putrid.' Another highlight, with drum-machine handclaps and bass buzzing static like a

bunker radio seeking signs of life, is *Hey Kids (Bumaye)*. Danny Brown, fresh from his own frantic Atrocity Exhibition, sends voltage crackling through the track with his agonised, off-kilter yelping flow. 'Stay Gold' goes off the deep end with a stuttering vocal hook underpinning sonar pings and relentless hi-hats as the duo brag shamelessly.

Mike and El have solidified *RTJ*'s aesthetic, and their verse-trading synergy makes *Run The Jewels 3* greater than the sum of its parts. Fury is channelled into their keen sense for the absurd, sardonic cynicism, deft intertextuality, schoolboy humour, compulsive theatricality, and joyously cartoonish hyperbole. The project stands on these qualities, and on a hearteningly generous conviction about people's capacity to thrive free from the influence of lurking

power-mongers. Timely.

**Cam Doig is a Third Year JD Student**

