

I've done the math to calculate how many hours I've spent at my desk since March 19th, and at my estimate it is 432 hours as of April 15h, 2020. My room is about 240sq feet in its measurement. I have a sloped roof, so I can actually stand in about 170 sq feet of it. I have spent about 594 hours in these 170sq feet. I feel like the numbers should both be higher and smaller, or that I should have more to show for it. I have a very nice view of our yard from my window, and I've started opening them with the good weather and bright sun and it makes it feel a little bigger than it is. I can feasibly go outside and lay on the lawn but the deadlines that exist make me feel as if I left my desk would be committing a great act of academic heresy. On the three occasions I've been out so far, each time I felt like it was clearer than the last that the way we act as if what we do in academia matters in the cogs of the system at large is just fabricated. People are dying and I must write about poetry and history and make a claim and be confident and present my research I've done over 432 hours at my desk in a meaningful way when people are dying. I know isolation is what causes my ADHD and depression to be worse, and it also feels a cruel joke to be spending 432 hours at my desk unmedicated and out of contact when I know that's what puts me on the brink of implosion. I was told by my psychiatrist to drop a class again, with four weeks left in the semester, because I couldn't cope with the deadlines and I felt like maybe I should, but realized I can't--even when we are experiencing a global trauma the next semester comes, academia continues, and I must have my requirements in order, even if now more than ever I feel like my research is bankrupt in its ability to be meaningful.

In *The Bell Jar*, Sylvia Plath uses an often quoted fig-tree analogy to describe the protagonist's inability to make life decisions about her career. In the section she describes how each branch is a path she could take, each reality a fig of a life she could have, and yet she sits at the base of the tree and starves<sup>1</sup> for not making a choice. She doesn't make a choice because to do so means she will lose the unpicked figs, and it is too big a weight to bear. I read *The Bell Jar* years ago and often think of the fig tree when I would make decisions and would often see myself starving at the base of my own with paralyzing indecision--now I feel like I've finally made the choices that fit me well and I'm trying to cultivate an orchard out of that one fig. It was going well. But now the orchard is on fire, and I am again paralyzed and starving at the entrance to it. I have a market that wants the product of my orchard and doesn't understand it's on fire. But I still have a bushel due by 12pm, April 16th, that needs to be at least 15 pages in weight, double-spaced and with footnotes. At the moment I do make a choice, and that is to walk away. I make art. Linocuts. And work to not cut my fingers, while the minutes of the missed deadline rack up. I know this, I can see the time, and I want to write and make a product and stop the fire but there is always a time when too much is too much to bear. I will continue to make art. And I will continue to sit at my desk, and starve for the shame of my inability to cope and in anger for the whole setting.

---

<sup>1</sup> Of very important note: the protagonist, immediately following the fig tree passage, has a meal and remarks that perhaps the whole image was just conjured up because she was physically, literally hungry. I can't leave out this section, because it has also always remained true for myself, especially now. I sit at my desk, do not leave my space, and eat once a day. I know that our soul feels more broken when our body lacks literal food, but there is always a sense of shame that comes after eating, that the relief somehow means the emotions you felt before were false, should be disregarded, and then replaced with shame for the way you acted. But perhaps I just missed lunch on accident again.